

A Study on the Role of the Parent in Educational Decision Making
from the Perspective of Parents and Teachers

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Abstract

A Deweyan (1916) democratic theory of education called for the participation of all citizens in deliberating important educational issues to improve overall student learning. Thus, the move to include parents in educational decision making can be considered to be rooted in democratic principles. To gain greater insight into the issue of parent involvement in educational decision making, one elementary school was studied and a triangulization method was employed in an attempt to clarify the important issues surrounding the move to include parents in the governance of schools. The three methods to gain information included surveys, interviews, and documentation of significant school events and related work. All of the parents and teachers of the school were surveyed, 10 parents and 6 teachers were interviewed, and related school events were recorded. The survey design was modeled on the Parent Involvement Questionnaire (PIQ) created and reported on by Chavkin and Williams (1987). The results of the surveys were used as a guide for the interview questions. An interview outline was developed based on Seidman's (1991) open-ended approach and Patton's (1980) standardized open-ended interview style in which parents and teachers were asked about their experiences and opinions on a number of parent involvement issues. Parents and teachers in this school indicated a greater interest in becoming more aware of educational issues such as school budget and school discipline policies. Although the parents indicated a greater interest in school matters and the teachers indicated a willingness to include parents in school matters, both the parents and teachers in this study perceived the role of the parent as advisory, not decision making. It was concluded that to ensure a meaningful and functional

role for parents as their participation in educational matters evolves, schools must have a clear vision of the primary goal of all schools, namely, to foster and nourish democratic citizens for a democratic society (Glickman, 1993). Furthermore, intentional practices such as Purkey's (n.d.) 5-P Relay approach, based on a democratic theory and practice of education, will have to be employed in order to give parents an authentic voice in educational matters and provide an avenue for parents to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge needed to do so. As schools, school boards, and the Ministry of Education implement parent involvement guidelines and policies, developmental needs of each school need to be considered to ensure the employment of democratic practices not authoritarian mandates. Parent interest and involvement, at whatever level, should be an important element in the overall move to make schools part of the democratic society they were meant to be.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM

Introduction

This was a triangulated case study examining the role of the parent in educational decision making from the perspective of both parents and teachers. This study included three components with the first one being a survey. One survey was administered to all of the parents and the teachers of a Kindergarten to Grade 6 elementary school. Results of the survey were compiled to help guide interview questions for parents and teachers for the second phase of this study. Ten parents were interviewed, 3 from the School Success Team and 7 who were selected to represent various demographics from the school population. One teacher on the School Success Team was interviewed and 5 selected teachers were interviewed to represent a wide range of years of teaching experience, teaching experience at different levels, and teaching different programs within the school. The third and final phase of the study involved documentation of significant school events that occurred prior to the study and documentation of studies and research that could be related to this study. The results of all three components of the study presented some evidence of how teachers and parents themselves perceived the role of the parent in the governance of schools. It also highlighted some of the bigger problems and tensions around parental participation in educational decision making as it related to this particular elementary school.

Background to the Problem

Over the past decade there has been much debate about parental involvement in

educational decision making. Livingstone and Hart (1993) reported that "over the past generation, Canadians have consistently declared an interest in greater public participation in running schools" (p. 10). They based their claim on an overview of surveys ranging from the 1971 Environics survey of Ontario parents to the OISE (Ontario Institute of Studies in Education) survey done in 1992. The OISE surveys on public attitudes toward education in Ontario had been given periodically in 1984, 1986, 1988, 1990, 1992, and 1994. The 1992 OISE survey found that "there is clearly now a very strong majority public support for increased involvement of parents, teachers, and students in running the schools" (Livingstone & Hart, 1993, p. 9). In fact, Livingstone and Hart (1993) included statistics in their overview of the OISE surveys revealing that support for parent involvement had increased from 59% in 1979 to 84% in 1992. This increased support was also substantiated in the most recent OISE survey. The 1994 OISE survey, designed and implemented by Livingstone, Hart, and Davie (1994), revealed that 85% of respondents agreed with the statement on setting up parent councils in order to give the public more of a say in how schools were to be operated.

However, when we looked at what the traditional role of the parent in education had been, it was found that the parent role had been a very limited role because as Pearson (1990) reported, parents had to date "assume[d] the traditional and conventional role of 'parent' - merely dropping the children off in the morning and picking them up in the afternoon" (p. 14). Pearson (1990) identified four types of parent involvement. These included:

1. The parent as audience--open house, Home & School and Parent-Teacher

meetings, and so on. 2. The parent as participator--governance of the school, advisory boards, and so on. 3. The parent as a worker in the classroom--either paid and volunteer. 4. The parent as an educator in the home. (p. 15)

One way in which parents had been involved was through The Ontario Federation of Home and School Association. The Ontario Federation of Home and School Association (1994) mission statement called for "proactive involvement in our homes, our schools and our communities..." (p. 1). This active involvement was limited to three of the previously mentioned areas mentioned by Pearson (1990) because parents had been excluded from the second area of parents as participants in the governance of schools because they lacked the legislative power to do so regardless of their good intentions. Now parents in the provinces of Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, Prince Edward Island, and Quebec had the legislation. However, little was known about what role parents actually wanted to take on in educational decision making. Were parents of elementary school-aged children willing to take on a more active role? What areas did parents feel they could influence? Did they have the time to commit to such an undertaking? Furthermore, how did teachers perceive the role of the parent in educational decision making? It was important to be aware of these perceptions to help guide policies and legislation to ensure that they were needed and necessary to be effective in giving parents a meaningful role in education.

Statement of the Problem Situation

This study examined whether parents wanted to be active in the governance of

schools and in which areas they were able and willing to have a meaningful function, from the perspective of both parents and teachers. Teacher perceptions, as well as parent perceptions were studied to provide a broader perspective of what the perceptions about the role of the parent in educational decision making were. A comparison was made between how parents and teachers perceived the role of the parent in educational decision making in order to assess the need for future legislation and policies regarding parental involvement at the school level and the Board level.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study was to add research to the field of education in the area of parental involvement in educational decision making. Chavkin and Williams (1987) reported on a number of insights regarding key questions which were used as a reference for this study. The important questions which Chavkin and Williams (1987) highlighted were:

- (1) What are the feelings of parents and [teachers] toward various aspects of parent involvement at the elementary school level?
- (2) What are the similarities and dissimilarities of [teachers'] and parents' feelings about different aspects of parent involvement at the elementary school level?...
- (4) What guidelines are suggested by survey results that administrators [and teachers] can use to enhance parent involvement in schools? (p. 168)

The research gained from this study could then be used to guide future policies at the school and Board level on parental involvement and provided insight to teachers and

administrators for future reference in the area of parental involvement. Furthermore, the knowledge gained from this research could also serve as a precursor to further studies of other schools and Boards of Education within the same context.

Rationale

Although Parent Councils had been legislated in a number of provinces over the past 5 years because the general public was perceived as wanting to take on a more active role in the running of schools (Livingstone & Hart, 1993), little research had been done to determine what meaningful role parents were able and willing to take on in educational decision making from the perspective of the parents. Furthermore, little was known about what role teachers wanted parents to take on in the move to have parents more involved in educational matters. If parent councils were to be legislated and new policies implemented, this knowledge was crucial to ensure effective growth and policies in this area.

Theoretical Framework

It was important to substantiate why parental involvement in education in which parents were to serve a meaningful and functional role was a valid issue in today's society. According to Dewey (1916), a democratic society involved the meaningful participation of all of its citizens in all levels of decision making. Campbell (1993) extended this concept and explained that "at the basis of all that John Dewey had to say about liberalism, freedom, community, and social ethics was the conception of

democracy as a cooperative inquiry" (p. 17). Furthermore, "if people begin to participate actively in the determining of their own lives, they will learn more..." (Campbell, 1993, p. 23). Participatory democracy was described as being educative for all those involved and in this instance could be related directly to the parents being involved in educational decision making. However, it was also important to note that this research study would adhere to the philosophy espoused by McAllister Swap (1987) in that,

the most important guideline, though, is to assiduously avoid any language which suggests that parents either have to participate or that they need to participate for their own good. Parents, like teachers, bristle when educational activities are offered to correct a deficiency in their skills.... It works better to assume that parents are already skilled, but that they continue to seek opportunities to learn more, to share with others, and to grow as individuals. (pp. 68-69)

Therefore, this topic was far more than a local or provincial matter but was deeply rooted in democratic principles with far reaching implications as will be expanded on in the literature review.

Importance of the Study

Parents, teachers, administrators, and policy makers on parental involvement could benefit from this study. As insight into the perceptions of the role of the parent in educational decision making were gained, effective policies and strategies could then be implemented to meet these perceptions. Furthermore, insight into different perceptions between the parents and teachers in regard to this topic could lead to discussions to help

identify a common role for the parent in educational decision making. The study also highlighted differences that needed to be addressed. This latter outcome could lead to further investigation and discussion of the role of the parent, thereby, positively effecting school and board policies on meaningful and functional parental involvement.

Since the issue of parent involvement was connected to a democratic theory and practice of education, it helped validate the importance of doing a study on the issue of parent involvement in educational decision making. Such a connection provided direction for how to involve parents in a meaningful and functional way based on democratic principles. For as Craft, Raynor, and Cohen (1980) concluded,

It is to suggest that relationships reflecting genuine participation and power-sharing need, if they are usefully to serve educational goals, to be reflected in carefully thought-out institutional structures, procedures, conventions, and understandings. Good intentions and goodwill concerning home-school relations are indispensable to the creation of such forms and procedures. They are no substitute for them. Given its deep roots in the theory of democracy, in contemporary humanism, and in the evolving character of our political institutions, the press to participate is not one of the fads or cults which, if ignored or gently patronized, will quietly go away. (pp. 15-16)

As a result, this study tried to continue the process of establishing a meaningful and functional relationship between the parents and teachers and the home and school since it had been, and still is, a current and critical issue in education.

Definition of Terms

Advisory council: For the purpose of this study, the term advisory council referred to a council consisting of parents of students attending a public school and educators who were responsible for advising schools on a number of school issues.

Parent: For the purpose of this study, the term parent referred to a parent or guardian of a child or children who attended a public school.

School: For the purpose of this study, the term school referred to a publicly funded elementary institution for teaching and learning.

Teacher: For the purpose of this study, the term teacher referred to an educator who had been hired by a school board to teach in the public school system.

Scope and Delimitations of the Study

The survey was conducted in one elementary school (Kindergarten to Grade 6). The survey was given to all of the parents and teachers in the one elementary school in the case study. There was a wide gap between the numbers to be surveyed in each group because there were far less teachers at the school in comparison to the number of parents to be surveyed from the school. A parent pilot survey was completed by a small group of parents and teachers from both inside and outside of the school. Minor adjustments were made accordingly. The results were assessed and comparisons were made between the two groups to be surveyed, namely, the parents and the teachers.

The information gained from the surveys helped with the formulation of questions for the interviews which were conducted at the school. Interviews were conducted in order

to try and get a more in-depth analysis of what the perceptions of the role of the parent in educational decision making were from the perspective of parents and teachers. The school was involved with the Effective Schools research as espoused by Lezotte (1993). As a result, in 1993, a School Success Team was established comprised of parents, teachers, and the administration. This team had been involved with a number of formal and informal discussion groups about the success of the elementary school. Therefore, 3 of the parents from this team were interviewed as well as a selection of 7 selected parents to help clarify or solidify issues brought forth from the survey. A teacher from this same School Success Team was also interviewed as well as 5 selected teachers on staff. Parents were selected to represent socioeconomic differences based on where they lived in the community, work status differences, marital status differences, and parents who had children in different programs. Teachers were selected to represent a wide range of teaching experience and teaching at the different levels in the school. These interview results were then analyzed in the hope of presenting a more focused role of parents from the perspective of parents and teachers. The interview phase was done as soon as possible after the survey results had been tabulated and the interview questions formulated to keep the study in context and keep results valid.

The last component of the study involved documentation of significant school events that had taken place prior to the study. Events such as the School Success Team discussion groups and meetings involving parents were documented to provide context for the parent involvement issues which presented themselves in this case study. Added to this was the documentation of other studies and research in the area of parental

involvement in order to come to some overall conclusions and resolutions and highlight the main issues and complexities surrounding the role of the parent in educational decision making.

Outline of the Remainder of the Document

First, Chapter 2 will begin with a theoretical review of the importance of parental participation in educational decision making based on Dewey's democratic principles from both a philosophical and political perspective. Second, this will be followed by a brief look at the historical background on attempts at having parents more involved in educational decision making. Advisory councils such as those formed in the 1970s will be looked at to gain insight into the present movement towards greater parent involvement in the running of schools. Third, the issue of legislating parent councils in Canada will be addressed to provide a current political framework which is helping to steer the parent involvement movement. Fourth, the scope will be narrowed to the elementary school involved in the study to provide some sort of context to the overall case study on the role of the parent in educational decision making and the issues which may arise surrounding this role.

In Chapter 3, reasons for triangulizing the case study to include survey research, interview research, and documentation will be addressed. The method for developing the survey design will be presented to ensure that all considerations and biases have been checked in order to conduct a meaningful and valid survey. The method to be implemented to formulate the questions for the interview will also be addressed to verify

the significance of employing this strategy to provide a significant focus for the interviews and qualify the information gained from the interview by relating it to the survey results. Last, recent and ongoing discussions and meetings as they relate to the involvement of parents in education will be documented and related to other documented studies and research to provide a broader framework before reviewing and analyzing the issues and elements that surface as a result of this case study.

In Chapter 4 results of the survey, the interviews, and documentation will be interpreted within and between each group to assess similarities and differences in responses and gain insight into the perceptions of the parents' role in educational decision making. As a result, the role of the parent in educational decision making will be defined from the perspective of the parents and the teachers. Issues and implications for future reference will be clarified at both the school and the Board level.

In Chapter 5, the role of the parent as perceived by parents and the teachers will be summarized according to practical implications, theoretical implications, and implications for future research and future school policies in the area of parental involvement in educational decision making.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

Democratic Principles and Parental Involvement in Educational Decision Making

It was important to begin this literature review by establishing the relevancy of parental participation in educational decision making. Dewey (1916) stated that a "society which makes provisions for the participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic" (p. 99). This concept was clarified by Robertson (1992) who concluded that "a Deweyan social science should prove its worth, not merely by causal explanation of social phenomena but by its power to reform social life for the better" (p. 347). Therefore, the need to link parents with educational decision making was grounded in the philosophical principles of democracy because it was encouraging parent participation in order to reform educational practices.

Democracy was more than just a form of government or a way of running institutions but it was as Stuhr (1993) stated, "a way of life requiring both inquiry and communication between all of its participants (p. 53). This indicated the need for parents to be participants in educational decision making if schools were to move towards reform from a democratic perspective. In this light, parents were seen as a critical element in all aspects of education including educational decision making. As Campbell (1993) contended "...Dewey's emphasis upon the relationship between democracy and education is not just a point about schooling, but about the ongoing education of engaged citizens" (p. 20). This was a critical argument for including parents in educational decision

making because it presented the possibility of continued learning and growth not only for the students but for the parents of the students as well. Yet, the critical questions remained, how do we democratize education? Although Dewey presented a strong case for engaging all citizens in educational decision making, Westbrook (1992) maintained that "...Dewey is weak in certain respects on questions regarding means to a democratic society" (p. 13).

Gutmann (1990) suggested that we begin with a full understanding and commitment to a Deweyan democratic theory of education. She defined a democratic theory of education as a theory which "...recognizes the importance of empowering citizens to make educational policy and also of constraining their choices to a broad range of policies that are nonrepressive and nondiscriminatory, so as to preserve the intellectual and social foundations of democracy" (p. 12). She emphasized that democratic education attempted to resolve the tension between civic virtue and individual freedom through deliberation. This related directly to the tension created when empowering parents to take on a meaningful role in the education of their children. For as Pearson (1990) reported "the concept of parental involvement has met with resistance from teachers, principals and often school boards" (p. 15). Traditionally, parents have had little power in educational matters and it has been difficult for both administrators and teachers to relinquish some of that power. How then, were educators to begin the process of deliberating important educational issues with parents, thereby, relinquishing some of the traditional forms of power? A framework was needed to help guide the process.

A Brief Historical Background on Parental Involvement in Educational Decision Making

The movement to bring parents into the forefront of educational decision making was not a new initiative. Reviewing the literature revealed a number of programs dating back to the seventies. Davies, Burges, MacEachron Hirsch, MacEachron Hirsch, Huguenin, Upton, and Zerchykov (1979) reported on patterns of citizen participation in educational decision making citing case studies of community control across various states from New York to Los Angeles. (p. 23-29) They went on to report on two parent advisory councils from Boston and San Diego that were established in the mid seventies. Berger (1981, 1983) wrote two practical guides, one for the school and one for parents respectively, to help in the advancement of parents as partners in education. In Berger's book a reference was made to the national programs formed in the 1960s and 1970s, such as, Head Start and the Elementary and Secondary School, that recognized parents as partners.

In Ontario, programs linking the community to the school in a number of ways had been initiated since 1970 (Eastabrook and Fullan, 1978). These included parent teacher associations, home and school associations, and local volunteer programs. The movement in Canada had not been as formal as the advisory groups initiated in the United States mentioned in the previous paragraph. However, reference to a more formal inclusion of parents increased in the 1980s. For example Metcalf (1987) presented a thesis on creating neighbourhood advisory committees in which he developed a booklet as a guide to undertaking the process of creating advisory committees. The feedback he received from the administrators showed a hesitancy on their part to proceed with such an

undertaking. Administrators were willing but were afraid of moving too fast and losing ground when bringing parents on board.

Parents as decision makers in the field of education was not a new concept or a new practice. It was an ongoing process that required close scrutiny and a clear focus to ensure a positive outcome for all involved. The question arose, how were we to continue the process of including parents in making educational decisions to ensure that parents had a meaningful and functional role?

Legislated Parent Councils

The process to include parents in educational decision making had begun through the legislation of parent councils. Following in the steps of Quebec, Alberta, and British Columbia, on September 7, 1993, the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training announced the formation of The Ontario Parent Council, whose job it would be to help parents become more involved in the education of their children (Ministry of Education and Training, 1993). These mandates revealed an awareness of the need to bridge and build a connection between the parents and the school. Were these policies which implemented parent councils a result of well thought out decision-making action plans (Hoy & Miskel, 1991)? If so, Hoy and Miskel (1991) maintained that these policies should have included goals, objectives, and criteria for evaluation, thereby, ensuring parents a meaningful and functional role in education. Or, were these policies mandating parent councils, as Beattie (1989) discovered in his research on including parents formally with schools, a result of political and social forces meant to appease the public.

Beattie (1989) found that many of the legislated parent councils had good intentions but that they were largely "...institutions where the gap between rhetoric and reality [was] almost a defining characteristic" (p. 10).

In Ontario, programs linking the community to the school in a number of ways as listed above, had been initiated since 1970 (Eastabrook & Fullan, 1978), however, the policies needed to guide these attempts in public or parental participation had been lacking. Phipps and Knell (1985) argued that these policies needed to be in place so that the school boards involved had a clear understanding of the reasons for including parents in education at all levels including educational decision making.

Traditionally parents had been associated with the educational system through Home and School Associations. The Ontario Federation of Home and School Association (1994) mission statement called for the "proactive involvement in our homes, our schools and our communities..." (p. 1). This active involvement had been limited to three of the previously mentioned areas mentioned by Pearson (1990), namely, parent as audience, worker in the classroom, and educator in the home. Parents had been excluded from the second area of parents as participants in the governance of schools because they lacked the legislative power to do so regardless of their good intentions. Now parents in the provinces of Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, and Quebec had the legislation but did this give them power to actively influence educational decision-making?

Before delving into this debate, it was important to note that in Ontario, the members of the Ontario Home and School Association had no input or had no part in the development and organization of the newly legislated Ontario Parent Council through Bill

125 (Ministry of Education and Training, 1993). It would seem logical that the Home and School Association would have played a part in the forming of this new legislation since they were the closest connection of the parent and the school prior to this new legislation. A verbal confirmation to do so collaborated a need for this link, however, members spoken to were baffled by their lack of involvement to date and were quite adamant at their desire to become involved in the near future. This led one to believe that the legislation of the Ontario Parent Council was merely, as Beattie (1989) found, a political maneuver because of the pressure mounting from parents to become more involved in the education of their children. This pressure was indicated in the surveys reported on by Livingstone and Hart (1993), in which support for increased parent involvement jumped to 84% in 1992. However, other issues need to be addressed before assessing the validity of the current legislated parent councils.

In order to adequately reflect the intentions of the legislated policies involving parental participation in the provinces of Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, and Quebec, it was important to review critical elements in educational restructuring, educational reform, and policy analysis. David (1991) identified some critical elements required for success in restructuring. They were, "first and foremost, a sincere invitation to change, then authority and flexibility, access to knowledge, and time to plan" (p. 12). When we looked at the policies on parental participation, it became evident that they were an invitation to change because they gave parents statutory recognition, which was something they had not had to date. The question of whether the policies gave the parents authority in education was much more difficult to pinpoint and was reviewed more

closely in the next section. When looking at access to knowledge, there was a very limited scope because parents greatest access to information to date had been through the media, which has had a very negative impact on how education is perceived. As a result, Livingstone and Hart (1993) reported that "in the past five years, all ten provinces and the two territories have set up commissions or committees to review the performance of their elementary and secondary schools" (p. 4). This had a direct influence on the legislation of parental participation but had it given parents access to more information. In Ontario "a province-wide poll revealed that parents want more information about how their children are doing in school and better access to the Minister of Education and Training" (Ministry of Education and Training, 1993). The result of the legislation was the publication by the Ministry of Education and Training (1993) of one Back To School report in which timely issues such as the new parent councils were discussed. This, however, was just a minimal start and much more would have to be done to ensure change and growth in the area of access to knowledge.

In order to assess the parental participation legislation, it was not only important to understand what was required to restructure education but it was important to understand "...the issues underlying the reform initiative" (Clarke, 1993, p. 7). Clarke (1993) maintained that there were two waves of reform with the issue of parental participation falling into the second wave of "...bottom-up reform taking place at individual school site" (p. 8). This substantiated parental participation in education as an important issue in Canadian education. Yet, it also revealed the complexity of the issue because as Clarke (1993) pointed out "...school reform advocates come from many different interest groups

with different agendas" (p. 8). This was only magnified if it was dealt with at individual sites. Therefore, legislation for parental participation at the provincial level was only a first step towards developing a more cohesive role for parents in education.

So it would seem, that parents had made gains through provincial legislation in Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, and Quebec because they had been recognized formally as a force within the education system. Parent groups were no longer just a diverse group at individual school or board sites. Parents were now part of a formal group represented at the provincial level. This formal representation gave them a greater opportunity for establishing common goals and initiatives.

In discussing foci for future initiatives, Clarke (1993) maintained that the next challenge would be "to develop a coherent strategy" (p. 10) for reform at the provincial and local level. Legislation for parental participation was working towards that direction. When looking at educational reform and educational restructuring some positive signs in the area of legislated parental participation were revealed. There had been change rooted in public demand and there had been attempts to develop coherent strategies just through legislation itself. The Ontario Parent Council (1994) reported in their major research findings that "in order to ensure a uniform ability for parents across the province to participate in the education system, the government must mandate, through legislation, a well-defined role for parents in local schools" (pp. 3-4). Through the initial legislation of parent councils came the demand for a more coherent and defined role for the parent.

Parental participation policies could have been rendered a success because of their

outward appearance of following a decision-making action cycle (Hoy & Miskel, 1991). It looked as if the problem of parental participation was being dealt with logically and was taking a step by step process. However, it was important to analyze the policies more closely to ensure that they were providing a meaningful and functional role for parents.

It was now necessary to analyze policy in order to verify whether the policy had achieved what it had set out to achieve. It may have seemed logical that it should because why else have the policy? However, as Martin (1991) pointed out, "although legislation is usually thought of as an instrument for implementing public policy, and public policy as a mechanism for expressing the will of the people, what appears to be true and what actually happens are not necessarily the same things" (p. 62). Martin (1991) analyzed the parental participation policies in British Columbia, Alberta, and Quebec to determine whether the policies actually gave parents "...a meaningful role in educational decision-making" (p. 63). Her analysis was reviewed and compared to what has happened in Ontario in order to assess the success of the policies and validate the need for a parent survey and interviews to be implemented in this study.

Martin (1991) based her analysis on seven criteria for legislative efficacy established by Sabatier and Mazmanian (1979). The seven criteria regarding successful parental participation included: objectives which are precise instead of ambiguous, a form of the legislation which is appropriate instead of inappropriate for parental participation, incentives instead of disincentives to comply to the policy, a formal decision rule to eliminate interest groups from making up their own rules, enforcement to give the

Minister of Education the power to ensure that the policy is being adhered to, oversight to ensure that implementation of the policy does not go beyond the scope of the policy, and adequate resources allowing for sufficient funds to carry out the policy at all levels (Martin, 1991). Martin (1991) concluded that the legislation in British Columbia and Alberta did not provide for authentic parental participation because the policy lacked most of the criteria for success, such as having clear objectives, incentives to motivate those involved to comply, and provisions for enforcement. On the other hand, Quebec policy did provide for the first five criteria and there was movement towards the remaining two criteria. She concluded that parental participation policy in British Columbia and Alberta was a mere token in which parents had been formally recognized but that parents had not been given the means for achieving a meaningful and functional role. To the contrary, Quebec parental participation policy gave clear direction and made provisions for direct participation. Where then did Ontario stand based on Martin's (1991) policy analysis criteria?

Bill 125 of the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (1993) was very vague because it just referred to the forming of the council and how members were selected. The Bill included no objectives; provisions for a provincial form, but no provisions for a local form; no incentives; no formal decision rule; no provision for enforcement; no oversight; and very vague information on remuneration and expenses. Upon speaking to a committee member, the Council itself was just in the process of establishing goals and objectives and deciding in which direction they would like to go. So an attempt was being made to move in the direction of being more effective. Based on Martin's (1991)

evaluation criteria, Ontario, like British Columbia and Alberta had not been successful in legislating meaningful participation of parents in educational decision making. This did not mean that it would remain that way because a start had been made, but much further growth was required.

Since the start of this study, the Ontario Parent Council (OPC) had started the process of making the move to implement parent councils more meaningful by initiating a report on the establishment of school parent councils in Ontario (1994). The recommendations in the report were made after an analysis of parent council models in British Columbia, Quebec, Prince Edward Island, and England/Wales and after determining the results of a province-wide survey on the current involvement of parents and parent views on involvement at the local level. The OPC recommended mandating parent councils, goals, composition, and authorities through an amendment to the Education Act. The OPC report (1994) stated that:

School parent councils should have an advisory role in the following areas:

Major decisions regarding the school year;

Curriculum and program development at the school and board levels

Participation in the hiring and performance review of teachers, principal, vice principal and other school staff;

Participation in the approval process for school/school board budgets

development of school policies. (p. 4)

Therefore, an effort was being made at the provincial level to give parents a meaningful and functional role. However, this report was very hard to obtain and nothing further had

been done even though the report came out in February of 1994.

Parental Involvement at the Local Level

As educators awaited the recommended legislation as stated in the previous section, reform as it related to parental policy was taking on a much more local and on sight restructuring as noted by Clarke (1993). Clarke (1993) addressed the two types of reform as top down and bottom up. While coherent strategies were being discussed at the provincial level, restructuring from the bottom up was occurring. The movement to involve parents in educational decision making was not standing still and waiting for directives from the provincial level. How then was the School Board involved in the following study handling this issue?

The School Board, which was in the jurisdiction of the elementary school involved in the study, had undertaken the "Effective Schools" challenge presented by Lezotte (1993). Lezotte (1993) had established seven correlates of effective schools with two phases for implementation. In the first phase, which he referred to as the first generation, the implementation of the correlates was initiated. In the second phase, which he referred to as the second generation, the correlates were extended and involvement was deepened. Lezotte (1993) presented the correlates as seven areas in which effective schools needed to work on. "Home-School Relations" was the seventh correlate in the effective schools challenge. Lezotte (1993) described this home-school relation as one in which "parents understand and support the school's basic mission and are given the opportunity to play an important role in helping the school to achieve this mission" (Lezotte, 1993, p. 9). Under

the 1st generation parents were emphasized as political allies. Once this had been accomplished, under the 2nd generation, "parents [would] be true partners" (Lezotte, p. 9). The School Board involved in this study had extended the 7 correlates presented by Lezotte to 12. Within the 12 correlates, the fifth one was Parent Involvement and Support. The School Board in this study was said to be heading into the 2nd generation phase in which parents were to serve a meaningful and functional role as partners. Some administrators speculated that parent councils would soon be mandated for all schools in this School Board and this in fact happened during the course of this study. As a result, many administrators had undertaken steps to begin the process of building stronger parent and school relations through the establishment of various informal committees such as, the School Success Team, which had been initiated at the elementary school involved in this study.

Summary

The time had arrived for parents to be involved in the governance of schools. But, before moving ahead, it was time to clarify what role parents were willing and able to take on in educational decision making. Furthermore, what were the perceptions of the teachers about the role of the parent in educational decision making. If policies at the school and Board level were to be effective, this information about parent and teacher perceptions would help guide successful policies instead of implementing mere token policies and councils as Beattie (1989) noted in his research. Furthermore, if teachers continued to be resistant to such involvement as noted by Pearson (1990), then these

issues needed to be addressed to ensure that it was a sincere invitation to change by everyone involved (David, 1991). David (1991) identified this need as a critical element in educational restructuring. Even if parent councils were mandated, getting a clearer perception of the role of the parent from the perspectives of both teachers and parents at the school level was important in the overall process of engaging parents in educational reform.

Therefore, the following study involving a survey, interviews, and documentation was an attempt to help the process of parental involvement in educational decision making from a school and a Board perspective. It was in no way exclusive of other methods nor was it all inclusive to guide future policies, but it was a step towards educational democracy in which meaningful and functional parental participation could become possible through greater insight and awareness.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Overview

This study looked at the problem of parent involvement in education from an open-ended approach. As Brewer and Hunter (1989) reported, the hypotheses about the problem would "...emerge throughout the research process, pushed forth by new empirical observations [and discoveries] that encourage the researcher to ask new questions and build new theories" (p. 57). As a result a multimethod approach was used, for, as Brewer and Hunter (1989) also pointed out, by

posing [the problem] in different ways, the problem ideally [as Dewey implied] unfolds to reveal new dimensions that facilitate the problem's solution. The variety of available research methods was a key element in this process in that it provided researchers with a multifaceted empirical view of phenomena and of the theories in question. (p. 65)

Therefore, a triangulization research method to include a survey, interviews, documentation of significant school events occurring prior to the implementation of this study and documentation of related literature and research was used in an attempt to generate a greater understanding of the issues and complexities surrounding the topic of parent involvement in educational decision making.

Steps Undertaken

The principal of the elementary school involved in this study was approached and gave both his approval and support in implementing the study. The study was initiated once permission had been granted by the school board research screening committee.

Description of Research Methodology

The process of gaining insight into parent involvement in educational decision making was initiated with a survey to help clarify the attitudes and areas of interests of parents and teachers towards the idea of involving parents in educational decision making. In her overview of emerging initiatives in ensuring parental involvement, Wolfendale (1993) described four developments which helped promote parental involvement. She described the first one as consultation with parents. Wolfendale (1993) claimed that "the model of consultation aims to go beyond the school-dominated presentation of its affairs to a participation that promotes joint 'ownership' of the issues uncovered..." (p. 110).

Wolfendale (1993) went on to list five consultation strategies which included:

1. use of questionnaire - for all parents or a random sample;
 2. conducting structured interviews;
 3. holding open-forum meetings where parents are invited to contribute to an agenda for open discussion;
 4. teachers collecting parental views on selected topics at parent consultation sessions or open evenings;
 5. teachers and governors working together to obtain parents' views on given topics.
- (p. 110)

Through the use of a survey, interviews, and documentation, the consultation strategy was implemented in an attempt to gain a clearer understanding of the issue of parent involvement in educational decision making.

Since the population to be surveyed was limited to the parents and teachers from one

school, the survey research strategy was combined with fieldwork strategy. In their work on multifaceted studies, Brewer and Hunter (1989) concluded that "most field research focuses on only one or a few groups, or upon a relatively small sample of individuals. This frees resources and allows fieldworkers to develop not only an inside knowledge of the group but also the necessary rapport with subjects to conduct intensive multifaceted studies" (pp. 45-46). Since the researcher was a member of the teacher and parent group of the school to be investigated, a rapport had already been established and this could help lead to quality interview material and documentation of significant events. At the same time, since the researcher was a member of the teacher group to be surveyed and interviewed, group bias had to be checked to ensure an accurate account of events and results. Thus, the need for a survey in which results could be used to help guide questions for the interviews to be conducted with 10 parents and 6 teachers. The interviews with parents and teachers, as well as the documentation of significant events, would also attempt to expand on the limitations of relying solely on survey results. Brewer and Hunter (1989) described the limitations of relying solely on survey data as,

leav[ing] little room for maneuvering into areas of social life about which respondents are unwilling or unable to report accurately, or that have a structure as yet unknown to the investigator..., surveys always involve a high risk of reactive measurement effects,...[and] the fact that most surveys are cross-sectional rather than being conducted over time.... (p. 46)

With the use of documentation of events occurring prior to the study, and documentation of studies related to the present problem some of the limitations were addressed.

The data gathered from the surveys was used not only to draw conclusions but to formulate questions for the interviews to be conducted with both parents and teachers. The interview research method was based on the three-interview structure presented by Seidman (1991) when using interviewing as qualitative research. Seidman (1991) described the structures as, the first one being a focused life history, the second one being the details of the experience, and the third one being reflection on the meaning. Although the interview research method employed in this study did not strictly adhere to these guidelines, aspects of these three structures were used to formulate questions for a single interview structure. Since the researcher had been a part of some significant school events and meetings, knowledge of this helped guide interview questions.

Through a combination of the three research approaches of survey, interviews, and documentation, the researcher was able to get at the truly significant issues and complexities surrounding parent involvement in educational decision making as it related to this particular elementary school. Even though the question arose as to whether the knowledge and insights gained from this study could be applied to other elementary schools, the knowledge and insights gained were significant for the parents and teachers of this particular elementary school. This case study involving surveys, interviews, and documentation was an attempt at applying a multimethod approach which was both feasible and valid for investigating parent involvement in educational decision making.

Documentation of Significant School Events

It was necessary to report on a number of initiatives and events that had already taken

place at the school to gain a greater understanding of the parent involvement issues that presented themselves during the study. It was these initiatives and events that had guided this study to its present stage in the process of parent involvement.

The elementary school was a new school that opened in a temporary site in September of 1993 and was moved into the actual school building in November of that same year. This school was one of three new schools in the Board of Education to open its doors in that year. As a result, the administrators of all three schools met as a team to coordinate and engage in professional dialogue on the opening of a new school. The administrators of all three schools agreed upon gathering information through a survey to be given to both teachers and parents of the new schools in order to gain insight into the areas of concern as well as the shared views on different school success factors based on Lezotte's (1993) work on effective schools. In the previous years the Board of Education had undertaken Lezotte's 7 correlates for effective schools and expanded on them to come up with 12 school success factors. As a result, the research and assessment department of the Board of Education designed a school questionnaire for both parents and teachers. Both groups were to prioritize the 12 school success factors. The 12 school success factors were; student involvement and responsibility; clean, inviting, and safe physical environment; student recognition; positive student behaviour; parent and community involvement and support; high expectations for all students; teacher planning and development; assessment of student progress; focus on instruction and curriculum; clearly stated and agreed upon goals for school; shared beliefs and collaboration; and instructional leadership of principal. Nineteen teachers completed the survey

and 22 parents completed the survey at the first PTA meeting held in the new school building. Out of 12 short term priorities, teachers rated the fifth school success factor of parent and community involvement and support as tenth, and parents rated the same factor as, seventh. As a long term priority teachers rated the fifth school success factor involving parental support as eighth. The long-term priorities for parents were not surveyed since the administrators were more concerned with short-term priorities at this time.

The school was building a climate for consulting parents to develop parent involvement and support. Not only were parents engaged in consultation through this questionnaire but other methods, such as holding open forums for discussions, were also held in the 1993/94 school year.

Parents were invited to attend a school success meeting to be held on the evening of March 30, 1994. To provide a focus for the meeting parents were invited to read an article on effective schools (Lezotte, 1993), which presented the seven correlates of effective schools. This article had been presented to the administrators and teachers throughout the Board through a lecture given by Lezotte in that same school year. The administrators and teachers on the school success team from this elementary school attended this meeting. At the elementary school meeting with parents, parents were asked to respond to each of the correlates. Those present included the principal and vice-principal, four teachers, and seven parents who had responded to the initial article. Ideas for further discussions included holding a more informal meeting during the day because some parents felt the nature of the article was rather intimidating and may have shied a

number of parents away. Furthermore, many parents had other commitments during the evening. Other issues presented included what to do about inconsistencies from school to school within the Board and across School Boards, what to do to promote basic skills without compromising the need to meet the demands of our ever changing present society, and the role of provincial standards and standardized testing. Positive feedback was heard from all involved.

The next meeting was held during the day on May 31, 1994 and it was far more informal, as had been previously requested at the last meeting. No notes were taken and the discussion was left open so there was far less to report from this meeting. Issues such as using school time to take the students swimming were discussed as well as issues regarding the transition of students of this junior elementary school to the neighbouring intermediate schools. The two administrators, three teachers and about 10 parents were present at this meeting.

In the 1994/95 school year, parents who had attended the previous school success meetings were invited to hear Lezotte speak at a local high school from 4:30 until 7:00 p.m. on November 1, 1994. Four parents as well as the two administrators and three teachers attended this meeting. From here the school success team involving teachers and administrators met to discuss future goals. The four teachers present remarked on Lezotte's (1993) comment that research is showing that those students who are not literate by the end of grade three continue to struggle throughout their remaining years in school. This was supported by the effective schools research abstracts (1992-93). Five reading recovery programs were reviewed "to determine whether one-to-one adult tutoring of

primary grade at-risk students could prevent early failure in reading " (Lezotte, 1992-93, p. 2). Lezotte concluded that "adult tutoring for even 20 to 30 minutes per day has a tremendous impact on the success of students at risk of early failure. Thus, schools should be as creative as possible in finding the resources to provide this assistance" (p. 1).

As a result teachers initiated a literacy focus for our school to include strong parental involvement. The result of this focus was to relate this information to the updated Learning Outcomes document. The Learning Outcomes document (Peel Board of Education, 1994) outlined the attitudinal and skill outcomes we should be working towards at the primary, junior, and intermediate levels. We were to use this document as a framework for reporting to parents, as well as program evaluation. How were we to encourage meaningful participation of the parents of the students of our school in this process? What attitudes and interests did we need to consider before going on to ensure a true partnership in which parents are actively involved in the decision making and not just in on the information receiving end? Were we to proceed with the few parents who had shown an interest in the previous meetings or were we to try and gain a more encompassing representation of parents from the school? The following survey design attempted to clarify some of these issues in order to facilitate parent involvement in educational decision making as it related to the situation at this elementary school.

Survey Design

To increase the validity of obtaining information on the attitudes and interests of

parents, the following survey was sent out to all of the parents of students who attended this elementary school instead of just sending the survey to a group of randomly selected parents. A similar survey was given to all of the teachers at the school. Before sending the survey, pilot surveys were filled out by 3 parents whose children did not attend this school and by 3 teachers who were also not a part of this school. Little negative feedback was given, so minor adjustments were made.

Time-line

Since the school was ready to set goals and possibly establish policies regarding parent involvement, the study began in the 1994/95 school year. Surveys were sent out with a covering letter in April, 1995. Data was collected. Parents and teachers were interviewed before the end of the 1994/95 school year to keep information gathered in context with the survey. Significant school events that had occurred prior to the study were documented to provide a context for the parent and school relationship that was being studied. Related literature was also documented to enhance the study and its findings.

Selection of Subjects

All parents and all teachers from the elementary school were surveyed. Ten parents and 6 teachers from the school were selected and interviewed. Three of the parents and one of the teachers who were interviewed were also part of the school success team. The remaining 7 parents were selected to represent a broad range of demographics. These

included varying marital status, socioeconomic differences based on where parents lived, varying work status, male/female representation, and varying experiences with having children in different programs. The remaining 5 teachers were selected to represent a broad range of years of teaching experience, varying grade levels, male/female representation, and varying programs. Teachers and parents were interviewed at school.

Instrumentation

The survey design for this study was modeled on the Parent Involvement Questionnaire (PIQ) reported on by Chavkin and Williams (1987) in their article on enhancing parent involvement. The survey used for this study was a self-report survey and followed the six-part questionnaire design like the PIQ instrument reported on by Chavkin and Williams (1987). Chavkin and Williams (1987) reported specifically on the PIQ designed and given by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) to Administrators, even though the PIQ was given to parents and superintendents as well. Even though the following survey was only given to teachers and parents, the type of insights that were sought and the breaking of the survey design into six parts acted as a reference for the design of this survey.

Chavkin and Williams (1987) outlined the six parts of the PIQ for Administrators and parents. The six-part parent questionnaire contained the following: (a) general attitudes about statements about parent involvement and respondents were asked to agree or disagree, (b) 11 school decisions asking respondents how useful it would be for parents

to be involved, (c) seven parent roles were described and respondents were asked how important it would be for their schools to have parents participating in each role, (d) 20 parent involvement activities were listed and parents were asked to what extent their schools offered such activities, (e) respondents prioritized a set of suggestions for improving parent involvement in elementary schools, and (f) respondents prioritized a list of reasons as to why parents do not become involved at the secondary level (Chavkin & Williams, 1987, pp. 169-170). The general outline of the aforementioned questionnaire was used to help validate the survey for this particular study. However, the present survey was to be different in two ways. First, since this study was not interested in a comprehensive base of information at the elementary level as was the PIQ given by the SEDL, it focused on two groups within one school, thereby, making it less comprehensive. Second, the issue of gaining information regarding the role of the parent at the secondary level was not dealt with since this was a Kindergarten to Grade 6 school and students move on to an intermediate school first.

As a result, the six parts included in the survey used for this study were: Part One: general attitudes were stated and respondents were asked to agree or disagree, Part Two: school decisions based on actual events reported on were stated and respondents were asked how important it would be for parents to be involved in each of the decisions, Part Three: parent roles were described based on Pearson's (1990) four categories of the role of the parent as reported on earlier, and respondents were asked how important it would be for their school to have parents participating in each role, Part Four: parent involvement activities were listed and parents and teachers were asked the extent to

which the school offered such activities, Part Five: Respondents were asked to prioritize suggestions for improving parent involvement. These suggestions were based partially on information previously presented by teachers and parents at the school success meetings. Part Six: Respondents were asked to complete a brief and anonymous profile.

A standardized open-ended interview format developed by Patton (1980) was used. Patton (1980) described this format as "consist[ing] of a set of questions carefully worded and arranged with the intention of taking each respondent through the same sequence and asking each respondent the same questions with essentially the same words" (p. 198). This meant that a set of prepared questions divided into four sections was used as a guideline for each of the interviews for both parents and teachers. This was to help keep the interview on track and also to keep it as consistent as possible. Yes/No questions were avoided. Types of questions asked were based on Patton's (1980) categories: opinion/value questions, feeling questions, knowledge questions, background/demographic questions, and time frame questions involving past, present, and future. Furthermore, a number of suggestions for conducting quality interviews were adhered to as much as possible. Patton (1980) made a number of suggestions to help the interviewer conduct a meaningful interview. These suggestions included, using only singular questions to avoid asking several questions put together, avoiding why questions and instead asking a more specific question to illicit a more focused response, remaining neutral, and asking for elaboration or clarification of responses when necessary.

Data Processing and Analysis

The first thing to be tabulated was the number of surveys to be returned. Borg, Gall, and Gall (1993) maintained that "a desirable procedure in a questionnaire study is to conduct at least two follow-up contacts of nonrespondents in order to get a higher percentage of responses" (p. 113). Therefore, two reminders were sent out in the school monthly newsletters and oral reminders were given to the students by the teachers. Percentage of survey returns and percentages of respondents who chose each alternative for each question were given, (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1990).

Results of the survey were then used as a guideline to formulate interview questions in the hope of obtaining a more balanced and informative view of what the survey results indicated. To analyze this data a number of steps were used. Seidman (1991) has written a guide for using interviewing as qualitative research. He highlighted a number of steps for making sense of interview data. After tape-recorded interviews had been transcribed, some of the steps suggested by Seidman (1991) were used. These included; studying and reducing the text, making what is of interest in the text, making thematic connections, and interpreting and analyzing the material, (p. 89-103). Seidman (1991) also suggested asking some questions to aid these steps. The questions were:

What connections are there...? What [does the researcher] now understand that [he or she] did not understand before [beginning] the interviews? What confirmations of previous instincts [and survey results] are there? How have the interviews been consistent with the literature? How have they gone beyond? (p. 102)

By reviewing the survey results, interview results, and the documentation, major

findings and questions were reported on.

Limitations

The sample of subjects for the survey was predetermined because of the fieldwork nature of the study. The researcher was a part of the teacher group and, although it may have enhanced rapport for the interviews, it could have also hindered respondents in certain aspects because the researcher could have been perceived as being too close to the situation. Some of the concerns were that since the researcher was a member of the school community, methodology could be skewed to fit the researcher's perceptions of the parents and teachers of the school. A number of steps were taken to limit such bias. The researcher did not discuss the survey results, the interview format, or any details of the study with teachers or parents prior to the implementation of the study. The surveys remained anonymous to encourage honest responses from parents and teachers. Interviews followed a format so that the same questions were asked in the same order to ensure coverage of the same material. As Patton (1980) claimed, "this reduce[d] the possibility of bias that comes from having interviews for different people, including the problem of obtaining more comprehensive data from certain persons while getting less systematic information from others" (p. 198). Furthermore, as Patton reported, it helped to obtain data that was systematic and thorough while reducing flexibility and spontaneity. Interviews were tape recorded and notes were kept to help set the tone for sticking to the interview format and having the interviews taken seriously. On a final note, the researcher who conducted the interviews was aware of a number of strategies as outlined

by Patton (1980). These strategies included using a tape recorder so that the interviewer could be more attentive during the interviews, giving appropriate feedback to pace the interview and maintain control, asking focused questions to get relevant answers, and avoiding any personal comments or responses.

A final limitation was that the study was conducted in a school where strong parental support had already been achieved in the short life of the school. As a result, results reflected in this study may not be applicable to a wider range of elementary schools.

Restatement of Problem Statement

The purpose of this study was designed to examine the role of the parent in educational decision making from the perspective of the parents and the teachers in one elementary school. Insight and knowledge into the process of involving parents in the governance of schools was gained to help guide future initiatives at both the school and Board level.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS OF THE PARENT AND TEACHER SURVEYS AND INTERVIEWS

Introduction

This study involved the collection of data to help clarify issues surrounding the role of the parent in educational decision making from the perspective of parents and teachers. The data came from parent and teacher surveys and interviews involving the parents and teachers of one elementary school. Added to this was the documentation of significant school events to provide context for the home and school relationship that had already been established. This chapter will give an overview of the survey results and show how these results were used to help guide the interview format. Results of the interviews will also be connected to the survey results when applicable. Significant themes and issues which arose from the interviews will also be discussed. As a result, issues surrounding the role of the parent in educational decision making will be highlighted. Furthermore, an association will be made between what the literature has to say about the role of the parent in educational decision making and what the interview and survey results revealed. The focus of this association with the literature will continue to establish the relevancy of parental participation in educational decision making because it is grounded in the philosophical principles of democracy. Also, some of the issues surrounding the role of the parent in educational decision making which arose during the study will be related to democratic practices that have already been reported on in other studies on this topic.

The surveys provided some interesting information regarding parent and teacher perceptions about parent involvement in educational decision making even though there

was only a 32.8% parent survey return rate and a 69.6% teacher survey return rate. Issues on which parents and teachers agreed and differed were highlighted. Furthermore, certain issues such as perceptions about parent councils were left unclear. As a result, such issues became part of the interview format.

Greater insight about parent and teacher perceptions about parent involvement was gained through the interviews. The interviews were conducted in a style in which open-ended questions were asked, thereby giving the respondent a greater opportunity to provide information through their responses. The following chapter will provide a more in-depth analysis of the information gleaned from both the surveys and the interviews.

Survey Overview

Before distributing the surveys to the parents and teachers, pilot surveys were given to 4 parents and 3 teachers, some of who were and some of who were not part of the school community to be surveyed. All pilot surveys were returned and no negative feedback was given, so surveys were not adjusted. Surveys were then distributed and the data from the parent and teacher surveys were compiled to generate an overall picture of the responses to the survey. Data analysis was done manually and generated descriptive percentages for all questionnaire items.

As discussed earlier in Chapter 3, the survey was divided into six parts. Specifically, parents and teachers were asked about (a) their attitudes about the value of parent involvement in education, (b) the kinds of decisions in which it would be useful for parents to participate in, (c) the importance of seven parent involvement roles, (d) the

opportunities available for parents to be involved in activities in the school, (e) suggestions for getting parents involved in the school, and last (f) a brief demographic overview of survey respondents.

Surveys were sent out with a covering letter with one child from each family at the end of April, 1995. Returned surveys were to be dropped into survey return boxes in the school hallways by either the parent, child, or teacher to ensure anonymity. An oral reminder to return surveys was given periodically by the classroom teachers over a 2-week period. A final reminder was written in the May school newsletter.

Completed parent surveys were received from 108 (32.8%) of the 329 surveys sent out to the parents of students attending the elementary school involved in the study (see Table 1). The low survey return rate could have been the result of many factors. At first glance it could have indicated a lack of interest on the part of the parent but many other factors had to be considered. The length of the survey itself could have hindered the return rate. Such a survey had never been distributed to the parents and therefore, parents may not have been fully aware of the purpose for completing the survey at this time. The researcher could have made more requests to have surveys returned and also given more explanation of what the survey hoped to accomplish to improve the survey return rate. However, for the purpose of this study, the percentage of parent survey returns was low but it was still important for giving the researcher some information on where parents stood on a number of educational issues.

Out of the 32.8% parent surveys that were returned, 76% were completed by the female parent of the household, 19% were filled out by the male parent of the household, 5.5% were filled out together by both the male and female parents of the household, and 1.5%

Table 1

Number and Percentage of Returned Parent and Teacher Surveys

	Total number distributed	Number returned	%
Parent Surveys	329	108	32.8%
Teacher Surveys	23	16	69.6%

were unaccounted for. Fifty-five percent of the parent female respondents and 90% of the parent male respondents worked full time at a job outside of their family responsibilities. The largest number of returned parent surveys (65%) came from families with two children. The marital status of 89% of the parent survey respondents was married. The findings from the returned surveys suggested a community in which family life was relatively stable and one in which the female parent was primarily responsible for being involved in the children's education at the elementary level. However, it must be noted that information was not received from 67.1% of the parents surveyed because surveys were not returned. Furthermore, since it was important to ensure anonymity certain information was not obtained. It was not known who returned the surveys, if more surveys were returned from primary students than junior students, and what the percentage of early survey returns and late survey returns was.

Completed teacher surveys were received from 16 (69.6%) of the 23 surveys sent out to the teachers of the same elementary school (see Table 1). Fourteen (88%) of the respondents came from female teachers and 2 (12%) came from male teacher respondents reflecting the ratio of male/female teachers in the elementary school. Nine (56%) of the surveys were filled out by primary level teachers and 7 (44%) were filled out by junior level teachers, thereby, balancing the findings from the two levels represented at the elementary school.

The teacher survey returns also represented a broad range of teaching experience as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Number of Teacher Survey Returns Representing Years of Teaching Experience

Years of teaching experience	Number of responses	Percentage
1-5	2	12%
6-10	4	25%
11-20	6	38%
21-30	4	25%

Attitudes About the Value of Parent Involvement

In Part 1 general attitudes were examined by asking parents and teachers to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with 26 statements about parent involvement. Teachers and parents were similar in their agreement on some statements and differed on others. Furthermore, some issues were brought to the surface for further investigation in the interview part of this study.

Over 88% of both parents and teachers agreed with statements about (a) teachers giving ideas about helping children with school work, (b) parents wanting teachers to send more information home about classroom activities, (c) parents helping children with their homework, (d) parents ensuring that children do their homework, and (e) parents being responsible for getting involved in their children's school. Over 86% of both parents and teachers disagreed with statements about (a) parents not trying to help their children with homework and (b) parents having little to do with their children's success in school.

Parents were divided on a number of statements (see Table 3). Statements on which parents were divided included (a) teachers taking charge of getting parents involved in education, (b) parents evaluating principals, (c) principals being in charge of getting parents involved in the schools, (d) parents helping their children with school work if they had more time, (e) parents needing to be trained before helping to make school decisions, and (f) teachers needing to be trained to make decisions with parents. This type of division provided information for conducting the interviews in the next section of this study. Through the interviews further clarification was given as to why there were divisions on a number of these statements. In the interviews parents were asked to give reasons for either agreeing or disagreeing with these statements.

Table 3

Statements on Which Parents were Divided

Statement	% of parents who disagreed	% of parents who agreed
1. Teachers taking charge of getting parents involved in education	54%	43%
2. Parents evaluating principals	51%	47%
3. Principals being in charge of getting parents involved in the schools	45%	51%
4. Parents helping their children with school work if they had more time	43%	50%
5. Parents needing to be trained before helping to make school decisions	52%	41%
6. Teachers needing to be trained to make decisions with parents	40%	51%

It was interesting to note that parents were divided on the statement about evaluating principals (51% disagreed and 47% agreed). Parents were less divided about the statement about parents evaluating teachers (36% disagreed and 62% agreed). Another interesting result was that parents were divided about teachers and principals being in charge of getting parents involved in education. The question arose, "Who should then be in charge of getting parents involved in education if not the teachers and principals?" As a result, parents were asked to give their opinion about these statements in the interview section of this study in order to clarify such findings.

Teachers were also divided on two of the statements that parents were divided on: (a) parents needing to be trained to make school decisions (44% disagreed and 50% agreed) and (b) parents helping their children with homework if they had more time (44% disagreed and 56% agreed). Other statements on which teachers were divided included (c) parents having the final word in decisions about their children's education (44% disagreed and 56% agreed) and (d) children having more homework assignments (56% disagreed and 44% agreed).

There were only 3 out of the 26 statements on which parents and teachers significantly differed (see Table 4). Ninety-four percent of teachers disagreed with having parents evaluate principals and teachers, while only 51% of parents disagreed with evaluating principals and 36% of parents disagreed with the statement about having parents involved with evaluating teachers. Clearly, teachers felt very strongly that parents should not be involved in decisions regarding the evaluation of teachers and principals. Only 12% of teachers disagreed with the statement about parents having a hard time teaching

Table 4
Statements on Which Parents and Teachers Differed

Statement	% of parents who disagreed/agreed	% of teachers who disagreed/agreed
1. Parents should evaluate principals	51%-47%	94%-6%
2. Parents should evaluate teachers	36%-62%	94%-6%
3. Parents have a hard time teaching reading or mathematics to their children	68%-25%	12%-88%

reading or mathematics to their children while 68% of parents disagreed with this statement. Parents who responded to the survey displayed much more confidence in their abilities.

This information was used to help formulate some of the questions for the interview. It was thought that the interview responses would give insight into why teachers disagreed so strongly about the issue of parent involvement in evaluating principals and teachers. Interview responses were also thought to be able to help identify reasons why some parents felt it was positive to have parents involved in the evaluation of teachers and principals.

Overall, there were not many major differences between parent and teacher responses, however, there were differences within each group. As a result, the findings stated in the previous paragraphs helped generate questions for the interview part of this study and will be elaborated on later on in the interview findings.

Kinds of Decisions in Which it Would Be Useful to Have Parent Involvement

In Part 2 parents and teachers were asked how useful they thought it would be to have parents involved in making 15 school decisions. Responses were divided between not useful and somewhat/very useful. The results indicated which decisions parents and teachers were divided on as to how useful it would be to have parents involved in making these decisions. The results also indicated areas in which both the parents and teachers felt strongly about the usefulness of having parents involved in making decisions.

The two decisions which parents felt most strongly about being involved in were (a)

placing children in Special Education (84%) and (b) amount of homework assigned (80%) (see Table 5). Over 70% of parents (see Table 5) felt it would be somewhat to very useful to be involved in the following decisions: (a) choosing classroom discipline methods, (b) evaluating children's progress, (c) evaluating teacher performance, (d) setting school discipline rules, and (e) assessing student academic needs.

Teachers agreed with parents on a number of statements and also highlighted other decisions in which they felt it would be useful to have parents involved in (see Table 6). Like the parents, teachers responded positively to having parents involved in decisions regarding (a) the placement of children in Special Education, (b) the evaluating of children's progress, and (c) the setting of school discipline rules.

It was again, interesting to note that the parents and teachers were in agreement in recording the highest percentage for having parents involved in the decision regarding placing children in Special Education.

Over 80% of the teachers (see Table 6) also responded that it would be somewhat/very useful to have parents involved in the following decisions: (a) deciding what's most important for the school budget, (b) including more multicultural education in the school, and (c) designing the school report card.

There were also a number of decisions that parents were divided on and teachers were divided on (see Tables 7 and 8). Decisions on which parents were divided on included (a) selecting textbooks and learning materials (46%-not useful, 52%-somewhat/very useful), (b) setting rules for grading students (47%-not useful, 48%-somewhat/very useful), (c) designing the report card (46%-not useful, 52%-somewhat/very useful), and (d)

Table 5

Parent Survey Responses to Decisions in Which Parent Involvement was Considered to be Somewhat to Very Useful

Decision	% of parent survey responses that indicated parent involvement would be somewhat to very useful
1. Amount of homework assigned	80%
2. Choosing classroom discipline methods	71%
3. Placing children in Special Education	84%
4. Evaluating children's progress	75%
5. Evaluating teacher performance	76%
6. Setting school discipline rules	73%
7. Assessing student academic needs	73%

Table 6

Teacher Survey Responses to Decisions in Which Parent Involvement was Considered to be Somewhat to Very Useful

Decision	% of teacher survey responses that indicated parent involvement would be somewhat to very useful
1. Placing children in Special Education	94%
2. Evaluating children's progress	81%
3. Deciding what's most important for the school budget	81%
4. Including more multicultural education in the school	88%
5. Setting school discipline rules	81%
6. Designing the school report card	88%

Table 7

Decisions Which Parents Were Divided On as to Whether or Not it Would be Useful to
Have Parents Involved in Making Them

Decision	% of not useful responses	% of somewhat/very useful responses
1. Selecting textbooks and learning materials	46%	52%
2. Setting rules for grading students	47%	48%
3. Designing the report card	46%	52%
4. Evaluating grade level programs	45%	53%

Table 8

Decisions Which Teachers Were Divided On as to Whether or Not it Would be Useful to Have Parents Involved in Making Them

Decision	% of not useful responses	% of somewhat/very responses
1. Choosing classroom discipline methods	50%	50%
2. Selecting textbooks and learning materials	50%	44%
3. Setting rules for grading students	56%	44%
4. assessing student academic needs	50%	50%

evaluating grade level programs (45%-not useful, 53%-somewhat/very useful). Some of these decisions on which parents were divided and teachers were divided were incorporated into the interview format in order to help determine the reasons for such divisions.

Two of the issues which parents seemed unsure of in how useful it would be for them to be involved included two major parent involvement issues (a) deciding what's most important for the school budget (64% felt it would be somewhat/very useful to be involved) and (b) firing school staff (60% felt it would not be useful to be involved in this decision making process). Last, the result of having 54% of parents feel it to be somewhat/very useful to be involved in decisions to include multicultural education in the school may have reflected the overall minority ethnic population in the school.

Teachers were also divided on having parents involved in making decisions regarding (a) selecting textbooks and learning materials (50%-not useful, 44%-somewhat/very useful) and (b) setting rules for grading students (56%-not useful, 44% somewhat/very useful). Other divided percentages on the teacher returned surveys were tabulated on the following decisions: (c) choosing classroom discipline methods (50%-not useful, 50%-somewhat/very useful) and (d) assessing student academic needs (50%-not useful, 50%-somewhat/very useful, see Table 8).

A decision which was considered not useful by both parents and teachers included hiring school staff (parents-70%, teachers-81%). A decision which teachers responded that it would not be useful to have parents involved in was the decision of firing school staff. Eighty-eight percent of teacher respondents while only 60% of parent respondents

felt that it would not be useful to have parents involved in this decision.

The variances throughout this section provided information to help formulate and guide the interview questions in the next section in order to see if some of these issues could be clarified. This will be addressed in the interview findings section of this study.

Interest in Seven Parent Roles

In Part 3, parents and teachers were asked to identify parent interest in the seven described parent roles: (a) paid school staff, (b) school program supporter, (c) home tutor, (d) audience, (e) advocate, (f) colearner, and (g) decision maker. Teachers felt that parents were interested in all of the roles with the least interest shown in being a colearner (75%). Over 94% of the teacher respondents felt that parents were somewhat to very interested in all of the other roles. Parents also revealed that they were somewhat to very interested in all of the parent roles listed, with percentages being a bit lower than was estimated by the teachers: paid school staff (68%), school program supporter (85%), colearner (77%), and decision maker (78%). Over 92% of both parents and teachers felt that parents were somewhat to very interested in the roles of home tutor, audience, and advocate.

These findings supported Livingstone and Hart's (1993) claim that "Canadians have consistently declared an interest in greater public participation in running schools" (p. 10) as was stated in Chapter 1. On the surveys, parents indicated an interest in all of the roles including that of decision maker. Seventy-eight percent of parent respondents indicated that they were somewhat to very interested in the role of decision maker.

However, the overall return rate of the surveys contradicted these findings since only 32.8% of the parents responded. Did this indicate that the interest of parents in public education was present but it was not yet, as consistent as Livingstone and Hart (1993) claimed? Other factors also had to be considered such as the length of the survey. Perhaps it deterred interested parents from taking the time to respond. One thing was certain and that was even after the survey results were collated, certain issues remained unclear.

Activities Parents Take Part In

In Part 4, parents and teachers were asked to what degree they felt parents took part in the 21 listed school activities. Responses were divided into two percentages; those that were rarely or never taken part in and those that were sometimes or often taken part in.

Over 89% of the parents responded that they take part sometimes or often in the following activities: (a) helping children with school assignments, (b) going to open house activities at the school, and (c) teaching their own children at home. Teachers also rated activities (a) and (b) with high percentages. Teachers went on to rate that parents had a greater participation in the following activities: (d) going with children on school trips or special events (94%), (e) going to parent/teacher conferences about their child's work (94%), (f) helping with fund raising activities (88%), and (g) helping teachers with classroom learning activities (81%). Overall teachers rated parental participation as greater on a number of activities than parents did themselves. (see Table 9)

These results may have indicated different interpretations of the statements by parents and teachers. Parents obviously responded according to whether they personally had taken

Table 9

Parent and Teacher Survey Responses to Parent Participation in School Activities

School Activity	% of sometime/often parent responses	% of sometime/often teacher responses
1. Helping children with school assignments	94%	100%
2. Going to open house activities at the school	95%	94%
3. Teaching their own children at home	94%	75%
4. Going with children on school trips or special events	52%	94%
5. Helping with money-raising activities	77%	88%
6. Helping teachers with classroom learning activities	33%	81%

part in any of these activities. Teachers could have responded from the perspective that they always have some parents who take part in the above-mentioned activities. However, the teacher responses did not take into account whether the participation by parents in these activities was limited to a few or whether teachers felt that a majority of parents always took part in the activities. Such discrepancies highlighted the limitation of survey responses since clarification could not be given.

Activities on which parents were divided on as to how often they participated in them included (a) going with children and teachers on school field trips or other special events (44%-rarely or never, 52%-sometimes or often), (b) attending workshops or other educational activities for parents (57%-rarely or never, 41%-sometimes or often), and (c) going to parent teacher meetings such as PTA or curriculum evenings (49%-rarely or never, 51%-sometimes or often) Teachers on the other hand were not divided on any of the activities. They either rated the parents as taking an active part in the activity or participating minimally on the remaining activities.

Activities which most parents and teachers felt that parents rarely or never took part in varied from decisions such as planning the school budget, evaluating programs and staff, and giving ideas for rule changes to the school and school budget. It was these decisions which were then discussed in the interview with the parents and teachers in the next section to examine if parents and teachers would like to see parents become more involved in educational decisions regarding the operation of the school.

Suggestions For Getting Parents Involved In Schools

In Part 5, parents and teachers were asked to agree or disagree with statements suggesting ways to get parents involved with the schools. The final suggestion was left open for parents and teachers to add any suggestions they thought would be useful that had not been listed. A problem arose in this section because some parents wrote comments which revealed that they had directly related these suggestions to the elementary school that was involved in the study while others did not comment. So, it is not known if some of these suggestions were rejected because they were already seen as taking place at the elementary school, or whether the suggestions were looked at in general.

Over 80% of parents agreed with all of the statements except for two, (see Table 10). From the returned survey responses, parents indicated that they agreed with employing a number of strategies to get parents involved in the schools. The suggestions included a variety of ideas such as sending out more information to parents and planning school activities for when working parents could attend. The least interest was shown in two of the suggestions but a majority of parents still agreed with implementing them. The two suggestions showing the least parental interest were (a) giving parents "assignments" they can do at home with their children (69% agreed) and (b) having more projects where parents and teacher are working with each other (67% agreed). There were no suggestions to which parents were adamantly opposed. Over 88% of teachers agreed with 9 of the 10 statements. Like the parents, only 69% of teachers agreed to the statement about giving parents assignments they could do at home with their children.

These findings suggested that both parents and teachers supported the idea of trying

Table 10

How Parents Responded to the Suggestions for Getting Parents Involved

Suggestion	% of parents who agreed
1. Send more information to parents about ways they could become involved	95%
2. Ask parents how they would like to be involved in education	93%
3. Giving parents more information about their child's successes in school	92%
4. Having activities include the children along with the parents and teachers	92%
5. Help parents to better understand the subjects being taught at school	91%
6. Planning school activities for parents at times when working parents can attend	87%
7. Make parents feel more welcome at school	83%
8. Have informal meetings where parents, and school staff can get to know each other	82%
9. Give parents "assignments" they can do at home with their children	69%

(table continues)

Suggestion	% of parents who agreed
10. Having more projects where parents and teachers are working with each other	67%

many various things to get parents involved with the schools. There was no one best way but it was a matter of trying different things to see what works. Also, different suggestions would work for different parents. The parents who responded to this survey were in favour of having a school try all of the strategies that were listed.

There was only a 10% response from parents and a 6% response from teachers in which other suggestions not listed were given. Some of the other suggestions listed by teachers and parents included (a) making supply teachers feel welcome, since many are parents from the community; (b) outlining the effect or lack of effect of parent involvement at the beginning of each school year; (c) using parents for presentations; (d) giving specific instructions to parents about helping a child with a project; and (e) parents giving more discipline powers to the teachers. This perhaps gave an indication about how asking parents and teachers for more input on different issues could increase the wealth of ideas and thereby, lead to more productive solutions.

Overview of Survey Results

Even though only 32.8% of the parents responded to the survey, certain issues about parent involvement were highlighted, such as the various attitudes to parent involvement and the types of decisions parents found it to be useful for parents to participate in. Furthermore, it was interesting to note that teachers perceived parents to be more involved and interested in parent activities and roles than the parents themselves did. However, these perceptions were based on survey results and a more in-depth probing was required in order to make more accurate conclusions about the important issues surrounding parent

involvement from the perspective of both parents and teachers.

Findings of the Interviews with Parents

With the survey results at hand, a guideline for conducting a standardized open-ended interview (Seidman, 1991) was put together. Minor adjustments were made after conducting a pilot interview with one of the parents from the community and a pilot interview with a teacher from the same Board of Education but not from the same school.

The interview with parents included four sections preceded by an introductory statement and followed with by a concluding statement. The first section was based on background and personal experiences as a parent involved with the school, the second section asked for parent opinions on a number of current issues regarding parent involvement with the school, the third section was based on the current move to have parent councils set up in each school and the role and function of these councils, and the fourth section dealt with questions about communicating information between the parents and the schools.

The criteria for including these four sections in the interview section of this study was a result of the survey findings. Many issues were left unclear. For example, just because parents showed a greater interest in certain areas of education, did it mean that they were willing and had the time to take on a more active part in these areas of interest? In the survey, parents were asked to respond to a number of questions about current issues in education such as having parents involved in setting the school budget, hiring school staff, and, implementing parent councils. However, because of the survey response format parents could not elaborate on their reasons for supporting or not supporting various issues

presented in the surveys. On a final note, interview questions could also probe into different interpretations of the survey questions such as "Did the parent respond with only their own children in mind or was there a more global awareness when responding to the various questions?"

The interviews were conducted to try and gain more information about parent and teacher perceptions of parent involvement in education. Survey responses were limited to a prepared set of questions and answers. Interview questions allowed for a greater depth in response than did the survey. This was not to say that limitations were not present during the interviews but that the interviews could provide information from a more open-ended approach and provide an opportunity to expand on answers in a way that surveys do not. Ten parents representing various socioeconomic backgrounds were selected based on where they lived in the community. Names were chosen from the office information binder based on where they lived and family make-up. The broad range of demographic representation included selecting a group of parents of varied marital status (married, single with sole custody, single with joint custody, and remarried with a combined family), varied ethnic background, varied work experience from part-time to full-time to full-time at home, varied participation in school activities to date, parents with students in varied programs (mainstream program and developmentally challenged program), and male/female representation.

Initial phone calls were made to determine if a parent in the household was willing to come into the school for an interview. Since not all respondents were willing, other approaches for choosing interview candidates were implemented. The teachers were

asked for family names that represented a certain part of the population. As a result, the researcher made a list and continued contacting various parents until 10 parents representing various demographics had agreed to come in for an interview.

Eight women and 2 men were interviewed reflecting a similar male/female ratio as was reflected in the survey responses. Two of the female parents and 2 of the female teachers were chosen because of their involvement in the school success meetings to date. All interviews were held at the school in the office conference room. Interviews were held at various times throughout the day depending on the schedule of the parent and the researcher. All interviews were openly recorded with the consent of the interviewee. Notes were kept as well to ensure an accurate account as possible of what was asked and said. Interviews were conducted within a 2 week time frame during the middle 2 weeks of June, 1995. A 2 week limit to complete interviews was made to try and keep the influence of parent discussion amongst themselves to a minimum until all interviews had been completed. All interviews lasted between 45 minutes to 1 1/2 hours. All interviews were conducted by the same person, namely, the researcher of this study. All interviews followed the same format in which questions were asked in the same order and were divided into the same four sections as was outlined earlier.

Brief Background and Experiences as an Involved Parent

Parents were initially asked about whether they themselves had attended a public school and how long they had had their own child in the system. These questions were designed to open the interview on a nonthreatening tone because answers were basic and could be

answered by all. Once some confidence had been established between the interviewer and interviewee questions were asked about their own experiences as an involved parent in the school to date.

Parents were asked to list ways in which they had been involved with the school. There was a direct division between parents who worked full-time and those that were home full time. All of the parents listed activities such as attending open houses, attending special events, participating in report card interviews and sometimes curriculum evenings. On the other hand, two of the parents who were home full time went on to list things such as going along on field trips, helping out in the classroom or library, attending PTA meetings regularly, and visiting the school whenever needed. The remaining eight parents all expressed a desire to be more involved and some even listed these activities but because of work and time constraints found it impossible to do so.

When parents were asked to describe how they felt and what it was that made them feel this way when they came to the school all 10 had positive responses such as feeling good, relaxed, great, and loving it. The reasons parents listed for feeling this way included feeling welcome, having an open door policy which was a reflection of the principal's policy and therefore, filtered down to everyone else in the school, and the school having a friendly atmosphere that was present at all times. Although this school had not intentionally employed an invitational stance as espoused by Purkey and Novak (1984), it had managed to begin creating an inviting environment for parents. Purkey and Novak (1984) listed five characteristics to describe an inviting family school. These included: respect for individual uniqueness, cooperative spirit, sense of belonging, pleasing habitat,

and positive expectations (pp. 96-97). Under the term sense of belonging, Purkey and Novak (1984) described the inviting family school as one which "cherishes community warmth and togetherness" and for pleasing habitat, "a pleasant environment for living and learning is stressed" (p. 97). From the parent comments to this section of the interview, it became clear that these two characteristics were present in this school. Although not all of the characteristics were commented on, it became evident that an effort had been made by the school to create an inviting family school. The fact that the school was new and was visually appealing with an atrium in the library and a courtyard in the center helped create a pleasant environment. The next challenge would be to foster and maintain this inviting environment. This was where some direction was required by intentionally choosing to become an inviting family school as described by Purkey and Novak (1984). The need for this type of commitment will be expanded on in Chapter 5.

When parents were asked to describe the most positive and the most negative experiences they had had as a parent involved with the school, 4 of the parents said that they had only experienced positive experiences. Positive experiences included having the support of both teachers and administrators during a personal trauma, enjoying extracurricular activities put on by the school such as performances and spring fair, and being a classroom volunteer.

Negative experiences were more varied depending on the personal circumstances of the parent involved. The parent who had a physically and mentally challenged child felt that she had to fight every battle for her child to be accepted and to be a part of the regular program at her prior school. She felt much more acceptance at this school and was happy

that there was a special program offered for her special need's child here at this school.

Another parent who was divorced and had joint custody of his child, but lived outside of the school community, felt that more could be done to include both parents in their child's education. Since one parent lived outside of the school community it was felt that a greater effort could be put forth to ensure that all newsletters and reports were received by this parent. This would take the onus off of the parent who resided in the school community and off of the child to do so. Upon request the parent did receive duplicate copies but this parent felt that the school could take a greater initiative in this area.

Another parent talked about an accident in which her child was injured and required hospital attention. She expressed a strong need to feel that her child was supervised at all times so that accidents like the one her child had experienced could be avoided.

Last, a parent spoke of a teacher who had difficulty coping and she was unsure of what she could have done to help the teacher, yet, at the same time protect her child from being in a classroom that was not being run as effectively as it could have been because of the teacher's personal problems.

Two conclusions were drawn after hearing about these incidents. First, that more should be written about the positive experiences that parents have had because the media in general tends to focus on the problems. Although Wood (1992) has written about American schools, he has done extensive research on schools that work. What Wood (1992) says about this issue can be applied to Canadians and their schools as well.

We are a nation that loves to complain about schools, yet wants to do very little to help.

If we are to have schools of commitment and community, democratic schools, schools

that work, we need to make sure our communities stand behind us. (p. 251)

Although putting forth a greater effort to share positive school experiences with the community would only be one small step in this direction, it would be beneficial for everyone to hear about the successes and what is working well to encourage further growth. How this could be done will be discussed in Chapter 5 under recommendations. Second, by being open and talking to parents about such issues, insight could be gained by all involved. Teachers could gain a greater understanding of parent concerns and situations and solutions could be found through dialogue based on what Campbell (1993) referred to as the "...conception of democracy as a cooperative inquiry" (p. 17). Little thought had previously been given by the teacher/researcher of this study about how to ensure that both parents feel included in their child's education when the parents are divorced. Although all divorces are not amicable, further steps could be taken after discussing it more openly with parents to ensure a joint custody of not just the child but the child's education as well. It was these types of insights that were gained throughout the interview process that reinforced the importance of having parents involved in the school. Again, how this could be accomplished will be discussed in Chapter 5 under Recommendations.

The last important insight that was gained in this section of the interview was when parents were asked to compare how their own parents were involved with their education with how they were involved with their child's education. All of the 10 parents stated that there was no comparison because things had changed so much. The parents responded to the question of how their own parents had been involved in their education with statements

such as "never," "they weren't involved," and "they did not have the opportunities as we have now to be involved." Most of their parents were not really involved with the school because that was the expectation then, just to leave it up to the teachers and the school. All of the parents felt that they were much more involved and aware of what was happening in their child's school and it was beneficial for their children. Some went on to explain that their children enjoyed seeing them at the school for whatever reason and it helped boost their children's confidence when parents showed an interest in what was going on in the school. This substantiated much that was being written about parent involvement. As Epstein (1987) stated, "the recent acknowledgments of the importance of parent involvement are built on research findings accumulated over two decades that show that children have an advantage in school when their parents encourage and support their school activities" (pp. 119-20).

Parent Opinions on Current Issues Regarding Parent Involvement

Parents were asked about their opinion or what they thought about a number of issues. The first question asked parents whose responsibility they thought it was to get parents involved in the school. Three of the parents stated that the initiative should come from the authority figure, namely the principal. One parent thought that it was up to the parents to get involved because no one could force anyone else to be involved. The 7 remaining parents felt that it was a joint effort of the principal, staff, and parents. Three of these 7 parents did express that it was often important for the school to take the initiative through a phone call or invitation and then it was up to the parents. These 3 parents went on to

confirm Purkey and Novak's (1984) notion that at heart, an inviting message is a "doing with" rather than "doing to" process to be initiated by the school. It cannot be something that is forced merely because it has become policy. How then did a school ensure that an inviting environment had been created? This school had started the process through having an open door policy, holding informal sessions with parents where they could lead the discussion, holding formal school success meetings based on Lezotte's Effective Schools Research (1994, described in Chapter 3), and continuing to ask for parent input on as many issues as possible.

The next question asked the parents what they thought about having parents involved with hiring the principal for the school that their child or children attended. Four of the parents were definitely against having parents involved with hiring principals because they felt that parents were not qualified to make such decisions because their lack of knowledge of the school system would prevent them from making an informed decision. As one of these 4 parents put it, "parents can't know the full dimension or requirements of the school." On the other hand, 4 of the parents felt that it could be beneficial to have parents involved in the hiring of principals if these parents had been involved with the school or had a relationship with the school already. Yet, these 4 parents also felt that parents could have input but that the final decision should be made the way it always has been made. One parent was unsure because they had been satisfied with who the principal had been to date and one parent thought it would be a great idea because it would be a good way to learn more about the person who was in charge of their child's school.

Overall, there was no strong inclination on the parents' part to be responsible for

making such an educational decision. Some parents wanted to be more aware of the process, some wanted to know more about who the new principal coming in was, and some wanted some input into the decision but parents clearly did not want control of hiring the principal.

When parents were asked about what they thought about having parents evaluate teachers, 5 of the parents disagreed with having parents be a part of this process. The reasons given included, "parents don't understand the system," "parents don't have or know the background experience," and "it would be difficult for parents to evaluate teachers because parents are not there every day." Three of the parents stated that it could be somewhat beneficial if parents remained objective or if the parent were involved with the school enough to make an informed decision. The last 2 parents felt that there could be a place for having parents evaluate teachers if there was a problem.

Once again parents were not eager to take on the role of evaluating teachers. They opted for input or had faith in the teachers or had faith in how the school system already evaluated teachers. This type of reasoning could account for the divided survey responses to the statement about having parents involved with the evaluation of teachers. Parents could foresee problems with giving parents this type of decision making power because of their own limitations, such as a lack of knowledge of what goes on daily in a classroom and what the school system is all about.

One area in which 9 of the 10 parents interviewed agreed that they would either like to be more involved or more informed was with decisions regarding the school budget. The reasons ranged from wanting to know how the money was used, wanting to know how

cutbacks were affecting the school, and wanting to know more than just what the news media reported on. Other reasons implied more of an involvement of parents in budget decisions by helping to assess needs for the school and then prioritizing these needs or contributing different points of view. The lone parent who disagreed with having the parents involved in budget decisions felt that it was the administrator's and board's job to do this and that they would know best.

This issue brought to light an important issue in the overall move to have parents more involved with the school. The question arose: Did parents want to be more involved or just made more aware of what was going on in the schools? Was the only way to become more aware to be more involved in making educational decisions in the school?

Considering that 8 of the 10 parents interviewed who worked full-time expressed a desire to be more involved with the school but lacked the time to do so and that most single parents work full-time and in many two parent families both parents work also, this was not an issue to be taken lightly. How then were we to make parents more aware if they did not have the time to be more involved? All of these questions will be addressed in Chapter 5.

When parents were asked about what they thought about being involved with the process of evaluating their child's progress or about deciding what was to be learned in the classroom, most of the 10 felt they could see some benefit. However, parents clearly stated that the final decision in both cases should once again be left up to the teachers and the school boards. There was some desire expressed to have input as parents, but once again, not be responsible for the final decisions to be made.

The responses to these interview questions in the second section revealed that parents wanted to know what is going on in their child's school and that some parents wanted to be made aware of how various educational decisions were made. Others wanted to have input into some of the educational decisions. However, due to a lack of time or a lack of experience with the school system on a day-to-day basis, parents were not eager to take on the role of educational decision makers, yet. Did this perception of parent involvement prevail in the third section of the interview when parents were asked about the implementation of parent councils?

Parent Councils

In the third section parents were asked about various aspects of setting up parent councils in each school. Parent councils were described as a unit in which a number of parents would be elected to serve on a council with one or two teachers, the vice-principal and the principal, a nonteaching staff member, as well as a member of the community and possibly a student depending on the age group of the students at a particular school, (Peel Board of Education, 1995).

First, parents were asked what they thought about electing 10 to 12 parents to serve on a council for the school. Council members would not be paid. The number 10 to 12 was suggested because of a policy program memorandum (No. 122) which was put out by the school board of this particular elementary school in the study in which a minimum number of members for the parent council of an elementary school was stated as 11, (Peel Board of Education, 1995).

Eight of the parents thought that electing a parent council for each school could be a good idea or that it could be feasible but they did list some reservations. These included: parent councils should operate in a controlled situation to avoid the chaos of an open forum, a parent council could get in the way of letting teachers and administrators do their job, success of the council would depend on the parents elected to the council, and lastly, would the parent council just duplicate the present parent organization, namely the PTA? The parents found the idea intriguing but were not convinced that parent councils would be successful because they had no previous experience to base their opinions on and they could see some limitations.

One parent thought that the idea of parent councils was great because it would give parents input. Another parent thought that the idea of parent councils was not a good idea because he felt that management by committee never worked well.

When asked about the best way to get members to serve on the council some important issues arose. Although most agreed with the idea of electing the council members because such a method would ensure true representation instead of selection, some parents voiced concerns about how this could be done. One parent in particular thought of the effect it could have on the child if their parent ran for a seat on the parent council and lost to another parent of a child they knew. Such a situation could make it very unpleasant for certain children. Likewise, children of parents who served on the council could also take on a superior position, making it uncomfortable for those around them. Would policy implementors of parent councils take such issues into consideration? Perhaps it seemed rather trivial, but not to the children involved. Furthermore, the purpose of implementing

parent councils was to improve the quality of education for all of the children involved. It was not to be a move to improve political agendas and espouse rhetoric. Listening to parental concerns such as these would make the process meaningful and insightful.

Most parents felt that having 10 to 12 parents serve on the council was a good number to have because many different groups could be represented. They went on to state that parents should on average serve a term of at least 2 years to allow people to have impact. One insightful recommendation was to have parents serve for 2 years but have only half of the 12 going out each year to allow for some continuity. This would avoid wasting time on having an entire newly elected group of parents familiarize themselves with the council procedures every 2 or 3 years.

It was interesting to note that when parents were asked about the effect that parent councils would have on the running of schools many stated that it could either be fabulous or it could be disastrous depending on those involved. Parents could give new ideas and have input but at the same time, decisions could get bogged down by this new level of decision making. The question arose, how would the legislators of parent councils prevent this from happening?

Parents did not allude to the positive impact parent councils could have on student learning. The researcher purposely did not mention this outcome to see if parents would connect their involvement through parent councils to the improvement of student learning. A direct connection was not made in their comments. This brought about an important element about the role of parent councils should they be implemented. In his research on renewing American schools, Glickman (1993) made an important point about this element.

"...A school may take on greater collective decision making, building a structure and making time for it, but still be no better place for students. Instead, people may make decisions that improve lives of adults (a better adult climate, more socially cohesive activities) rather than making decisions that improve teaching and learning. (p. 23)

Glickman (1993) went on to state that the only way to ensure a positive outcome for student learning was to have a clear understanding of the primary goal of schools. He defined the primary goal of schools as, "fostering citizenship in a democracy" (p.23).

This crucial ingredient for ensuring the success of parent councils will be elaborated on in Chapter 5.

Parents were then asked to list the qualities a parent should have to serve on such a parent council. The qualities listed were: open-mindedness, a willingness to listen to all ideas, a sincere interest in education, the ability to offer opinions, a spirit of cooperation, and tolerance. But then 6 of the parents also stated that they felt parents on the council should have either some background experience with the school, or prior involvement with the school, or the time to be involved with the school while they served on the council. These last qualities would then exclude full-time working parents because most would not have had nor will they have time to be involved with the school to gain a solid background experience. Parents felt that it would be critical for parents to have some familiarity with the school in order for them to give informative advice or make informed decisions. This highlights another important issue: How would implementors of parent councils ensure representation of parents with part-time and full-time jobs, as well as stay-at-home parents on the parent councils? What if only parents from one or two of the previously stated

groups was represented?

When parents were then asked whether parent councils should be advisory or decision making, 9 out of 10 quickly responded that parent councils should be advisory. Reasons given varied. Several agreed strongly with giving input to parents but allowing the teachers and administrators who have to live with the decisions make the final decisions. To make a similar point, one parent stated, "would a group of carpenters allow a group of adults who did not work in their trade make decisions about their carpentry work?" The obvious answer was no. Others stated that if all decisions were made locally at each school there could be too much variance from school to school. Input was productive but decision making was not seen in a positive light. Two of the parents feared that personal agenda items could be brought forth too easily if so much power were given to parents.

The only dissenter amongst the group argued that if parents were part of the actual decision-making process they would be forced to think harder about issues and not just spew out idea after idea. It would validate their work and force them to take it more seriously.

If parent councils were looked at from the perspective of a democratic society, Dewey (1916) stated that "a society which makes provision for the participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of it's institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic" (p. 99). Participatory democracy meant including parents in the decision-making process so that they would be on equal terms with teachers and administrators. Yet, clearly, parents

interviewed for this study did not feel ready for this task. What then would be the purpose of an advisory parent council? It could be the first step towards creating the ideal in which all members of the parent council would be empowered to make educational decisions. However, this process must be approached with some solid foundation in democratic principles and with intentional practices in order to ensure that the move to implement parent councils was not just marked to meet the temporary needs of present political and social forces and to ensure that councils were not just "institutions where the gap between rhetoric and reality was almost a defining characteristic" (Beattie, 1989, p. 10)

It became clear that the majority of parents who were interviewed relished the idea of having a forum for asking questions and giving their ideas. However, they did not see themselves ready to take on an educational decision-making role at this time. Parents felt that they did not know enough about the school system to become decision makers but they did want to become aware of what was going on in the schools through any method that was productive. Parent councils could provide one avenue to help this process but other avenues would also have to be explored in Chapter 5.

Communication Between the School and Home

The final section of the interview asked parents about ways information was communicated between the school and the home. Specific questions were asked about the school monthly newsletters, report cards, and interview and conference sessions.

In general, parents were satisfied with the way information was communicated through the three previously mentioned methods. It must be noted that in this particular school

community, English as a Second Language was not a major factor.

Parents cited the school monthly calendar which lists various school activities from trips to clubs as the most helpful and appreciated item in the school newsletter. Some felt that the newsletter was long and they did not always have time to go through everything in the newsletter but that they would not change anything about it. Others asked that the newsletter include more information not just about the school but about what was going on in the local school board as well. Finally, one parent asked that teacher profiles be included in the newsletter just to help them get to know the various teachers better. Overall, newsletters were seen as an important way of communicating information to all parents.

Parents were also generally pleased with the report cards and follow-up interview or conference sessions that were held at this school to keep parents informed about their child's progress or needs. Some parents still found it difficult that no ABC or percentage grading system was used as had been used when they went to school, but they found that the time spent one-on-one with the teacher at the interview or conference sessions helped clarify any questions or concerns they had after receiving the report card. Furthermore, parents talked about feeling comfortable about contacting the teacher either by phone or in person if any concerns arose at any other time. This access was a key factor in keeping parents satisfied that communication geared around their child required little change.

Parents were then asked if there were any other ways they would like to communicate information between the school and home and if they had more information to communicate. No significant insights were revealed.

Parents were then thanked for taking the time to contribute such valuable information. Although interviewing 10 parents was a very time consuming and tiring process, the teacher/researcher of this project had a feeling of wanting to continue the process by talking to as many parents as possible. The reason for this being that in each interview at least one new important insight was gained whether it be about considering a parent perspective or about electing parent councils. After these interviews, all reservations about including parents in the process of educational decision making were put aside because the teacher/researcher could see the tremendous benefits for all involved. This in no way minimized the complications and work required to implement the process but highlighted to need to do so.

Findings of the Interviews with Teachers

In order to balance the representation of teachers for the interviews, teachers were selected based on their years of teaching experience so that a wide range was covered. This range of teaching experience was balanced across the primary and junior divisions of the school. Since this school also had a developmentally challenged class this was also taken into consideration when selecting teachers for the interviews.

The interview outline for the teachers was divided into the same four sections as the interview for the parents. Six teachers whose experience in the field ranged from 5 years to 24 years were interviewed. Two primary teachers were interviewed, one male and one female, and 2 junior teachers were interviewed, one male and one female. The last 2 female interviewees included one special education teacher who had been a resource

teacher and was now in charge of a developmentally challenged class, and one librarian who had had a wide range of experience from classroom teacher of various grades to her present assignment.

Once again the interview started with some questions to gain a little knowledge of the teachers background as a teacher. Then teachers were asked to list ways in which they had had parents involved in the school. Having parents in the classroom as volunteers was the most common way. Other ways that teachers had had parents involved included: going on classroom trips, coming in to help for special events, and of course having parents in for interviews or conferences.

When teachers were asked how they felt when parents were present in their classrooms, all responded that they felt relaxed most of the time. One teacher talked about feeling anxious if a situation arose which required disciplinary action by the teacher. Another stated that it depended on the type of parent. If a parent came in with a personal agenda then it was not quite as comfortable for the teacher. On the other hand another teacher stated, "I love it when parents come in because they tend to become more appreciative of my efforts." The responses to this question reflected a great change that has taken place in the relationship between the parent and the school. Teachers accepted the fact of having parents in the classroom as part of the job. Even though it was not always the most comfortable situation it was a situation they had adjusted to and no longer questioned.

All of the teachers mentioned that the open door policy of this school, endorsed by the principal, in which parents were encouraged to come into the school helped foster a positive feeling for both teachers and parents. As a result, many found it hard to isolate the

most positive experience they had had with a parent or group of parents because they had had so many positive experiences. When pressed, they mentioned situations in which parents and teachers had developed a closer adult-to-adult relationship and were now on a first name basis. One teacher commented on her appreciation of having parents make special arrangements to be a part of a study unit on jobs and another spoke of receiving appreciative phone calls. Not only did the parents become more appreciative but so did the teachers. Having parents involved in the school produced some positive benefits for both parents and teachers.

On the other hand some negative experiences did arise when parents were involved with the school. One teacher mentioned a parent volunteer who was always critical of what was going on and was very eager to give advice. Another spoke of a few political parents who were lobbying for things they believed in. These parents approached situations in a confrontational manner hoping to force their agendas onto others. Another incident involved a parent who became very accusatory before getting all of the details of the events which led up to a situation in which her child had been involved.

Even though these teachers had been involved in some negative experiences, they all viewed them as isolated incidents which in no way discouraged them from having parents involved in their classrooms. The positive feelings outweighed the negative showing that not only were parents eager to be more involved but teachers were also ready to have the parents become more involved.

Perhaps some of the reasons for this were given when teachers were asked how they thought having parents in the classroom had affected them as a teacher. Teachers spoke of

gaining a better perspective of the students outside of the classroom, becoming more aware of what you as a teacher were doing, gaining a greater understanding of the parent's perspective, and having more time to spend with the students when parents took the time to come in to help out and do some repetitive, yet, important tasks for the teacher. One teacher did state that at times they felt obligated to take on parent volunteers when they did not really want or need them.

So, teachers were then asked what they would change about how parents are involved in the school if they had the power. Five of the 6 teachers spoke about having either the school, the School Board, or the Ministry of Education establish some set of guidelines or policies for parents so that they would have a clearer understanding about their role as a parent involved in the school. This was exactly what was happening at the School Board and Ministry level at the time and these interview statements confirmed that there was a need to do so. Teachers were eager to have parents involved but having a set of guidelines or policies would give teachers a vehicle for dealing with negative experiences with parents or dealing with special interest groups or parents with personal agendas. These last two issues were of greatest concern for teachers. In the next two sections of the interviews, although many positive responses were given about parent involvement, it was the issues of what to do about special interest groups and parents with hidden agendas that was of greatest concern to teachers when encouraging parents to become more involved in the school.

Even though the teachers were not asked in this interview to offer solutions or ways around this problem of special interest groups, Glickman (1993) has offered insight into

this dilemma. Glickman has done extensive research on renewing schools and although his research has been based on American schools what he has found can be applied to Canadian schools. Glickman stated that

The problem with schools is that it is not clear what primary and essential goals should stand as measures of success. Instead, different interest groups vie for schools' attention. When the goal of one group is accomplished well, another group lambastes the school for not doing better on its goal. The only way to rectify this situation is to make it clear that there is only one primary goal for American [and Canadian] public schools: to return to its essence and prepare its students to become productive citizens of our democracy. (p. 8)

Added to this Gutmann (1990) contended that "a democratic theory of education recognizes the importance of empowering citizens to make educational policy and also of constraining their choices to a broad range of policies that are nonrepressive and nondiscriminatory,..." (Gutmann, 1990, p. 12). The biggest concerns that teachers had about involving parents in educational decision making could be attended to if there were a commitment to a democratic theory and practice of education. This was not to say that it would be easy to keep interest groups and groups with personal agendas from pursuing their demands or beliefs. However, if there were a sincere commitment to deliberate issues and make informed decisions that are nonrepressive and nondiscriminatory, guidelines would be in place to ensure that informed and moral choices were being made.

Through the survey results and interview results, it became clear that the issue of involving parents in educational decision making was complex and required more than

quick easy solutions. It was not going to be enough to implement parent councils and then exhort that we now have parents involved so let's move on. Involving parents in educational decision making would require hard work at all levels to ensure that what was being done was grounded in democratic principles and intentional practices. Such commitment would help resolve some of the issues that were coming to light such as, what to do about special interest groups.

Teacher Opinions on Current Issues Regarding Parent Involvement

Teachers were also asked whose responsibility they thought it was to get parents involved in the school. Like the parents, most thought that it was a joint effort. However, 3 of the teachers went on to state that it had to start with a welcoming plan initiated by the principal. In other words it was up to the principal and then the staff to make parents feel welcome and invite parents to the school. It was then the responsibility of the parents to make the effort to respond to these invitations. It was interesting that some of the teachers and the parents thought that it was important for the principal to implement an open door policy in which parents were made to feel welcome in the school at any time.

It was this type of open door policy which put parents at ease because it made them feel a part of the school. At the same time it also put the teachers at ease because it helped the parents approach the school with a very positive attitude. As a result, both parents and teachers of this school felt that a positive relationship had been established.

When teachers were asked about what they thought about having parents involved with hiring principals and evaluating teachers all responded negatively. This reflected the

outcome of the previously mentioned survey responses as well. Reasons given included: "parents don't have a firm grasp of the responsibilities," "parents are not educators so they don't have the knowledge to determine school needs," and "it gets too political." Teachers were much more forceful in their responses than the parents had been. Some of the teachers did say that having some input could be beneficial if proper guidelines and policies were in place. One teacher also felt that there should be some avenue for parents to voice their concerns about a teacher. One teacher asked why parents were being considered for taking a role in hiring principals when teachers had not yet even taken on such a role. However, teachers were definitely against having parents involved in making these decisions.

On the question of having parents involved with making decisions regarding the school budget, teachers were more open to allowing parents to have input in this area. But, the 6 teachers interviewed did not feel that parents should help make the final decision. Once again most teachers felt that parents lacked the background knowledge and experience to accurately assess the school's needs.

Teachers responded more positively to the idea of having parents more involved in evaluating their child's progress. Most of the teachers spoke of the parents as being experts on their child and that this information was most beneficial to teachers in terms of assessing a child's needs and programming for those needs. Although the parents interviewed also responded favourably to this question they did not see their role in this area as being as important as the teachers did.

Teachers were open to having input from parents in determining what is to be learned but they did not feel that parents should be involved in making such decisions. Teachers

and parents were in total agreement on this issue.

Last, when teachers were asked if there were other ways they would like to see parents involved with the school that had not been discussed, 3 of the teachers had something to add. One felt that a parent mentoring system would be a way to get parents involved. By this the teacher thought of having parents act as a mentor for a child other than their own who was experiencing difficulties either at home or at school. Another teacher felt that all of the avenues for having parents involved were already in place. The final idea was to see how local community businesses could be involved in making a positive contribution to the running of the school.

Overall, teachers and parents were in agreement with most of the issues presented in this part of the interview. However, teachers were less open to having parents involved in making certain decisions such as hiring principals whereas parents were more open to having input for themselves. Both groups were in agreement in not having parents involved in making the educational decisions mentioned in the interview because both groups felt that parents lacked the knowledge and experience to make informed decisions. It was important to see how parent and teacher opinions on current issues regarding parent involvement were very similar. This was an important factor to consider when planning to implement policies and guidelines on the issue of parent involvement. Furthermore, why did it seem that the news media always mentioned the relationship between parents and the school when there was a confrontation or a rift? Rarely has there been mention of a joint partnership as had been developed in this school. It was time that issues on which parents and teachers agreed on were recognized as well, in order to establish a base from which to

work out the conflicts or difficult issues.

Parent Councils

When teachers were asked about electing a parent council for each school as described earlier, most responded negatively to the suggested number of parents, namely, 11, that were to serve on the council. Reasons given included the lack of balance or lack of equal representation this would create. Although most of the teachers stated that the idea of having a parent council sounded good, they did not necessarily see the benefits. Teachers were concerned about parent councils adding another level of bureaucracy, thereby, causing decisions to get bogged down in the process. Along with this they wondered how certain parent groups could be prevented from lobbying support for special interests or personal agendas. Furthermore, where would parents, teachers, and administrators find the time to meet and discuss and then decide on important decisions.

All of the teachers did agree that if parent councils were to be put in place, electing parents to the positions on the council was the fairest way to have parents represented. All teachers also stated that parents should at least serve for a 2 to 3 year term to allow for effective input. Teachers did wonder what would happen if not enough parents came forward to fill the positions and what would also happen if it was only the same group of parents who year after year showed an interest to serve on the council. It was such issues which had to be included in the policies to be set out by the Ministry of Education and the School Boards.

When asked about what effect teachers thought parent councils would have on the

running of schools, 2 teachers thought that it would have little impact on this school because such a positive relationship between the parents and the schools had already been established. Therefore, they foresaw the parent council as a continuation of this positive relationship. However, 2 other teachers did predict that this would not always be the case. For schools that did not yet have such a welcoming environment for parents, or schools in which there already was some dissension between parent groups, parent councils could prove to be disruptive and very time consuming. Both teachers claimed to have worked in such environments so they were not just speculating about what it was like in other schools. How then would policies be implemented to ensure a positive outcome for parent councils, even though many schools would be starting this process with varying positive and negative degrees of parent participation already in place?

Once again, Glickman (1993) who has done extensive research on renewing American schools, has found that different approaches need to be implemented to meet the developmental needs of various schools. He has listed three types of decision making approaches: (a) authoritarian and advisory approach, (b) input-and-selection approach, and (c) collaborative approach. (Glickman, 1993, p. 85) Each school would have to determine where they are in this process to become democratic institutions and then slowly start making changes so that they move away from the authoritarian and advisory approach to the collaborative approach. Glickman (1993) stressed that this would not be an easy or quick process but one that would require a deep commitment to get through the struggles and work that this would involve. The issues such as this one, that are presenting themselves through these interviews were critical factors to consider, but they were issues

that could be dealt with and possibly resolved if there were a commitment to work democratically.

The next section of the interview dealt with having teachers list qualities that they felt parents should have if they were to serve on a parent council. Like the parents, teachers listed similar qualities that they felt parents should have to serve on the parent council. These included: prior experience with the school, open-mindedness, good listener, and a sincere interest in all of the children not just their own. Teachers went on to list other qualities that parents should have like an awareness of learning and teaching styles. Parents should have the skills for researching issues and negotiating differences. However, once again the same dilemma arose. How would the working parents be represented if they did not have or would not have the time to be involved in the school to gain some experience and background knowledge since this was considered to be an important quality that a parent should have to serve on the council? Furthermore, a number of parents and teachers stated that they felt parents serving on the council should be well educated. This would exclude a large number of parents. What would happen in areas where a large portion of the school population came from homes in which English was a second language?

A framework was needed from which to work so that educators could begin the process of deliberating important educational issues with parents. Purkey and Novak (1984) offered a practical approach through their concept of invitational education. Central to this democratic approach were four basic principles:

- ...(1) people are able, valuable and responsible and should be treated accordingly; (2) teaching should be cooperative activity; (3) people possess relatively untapped

potential in all areas of human development; and (4) this potential can best be realized by places, policies, and programs that are specifically designed to invite development, and by people who are personally and professionally inviting to themselves and others.

(p. 2)

Such an approach was similar to the creation of an inviting family school which was discussed earlier on in this chapter. Educators would need to acquire new strategies that were based on democratic principles to ensure a meaningful and functional role for parents should they take on the role of educational decision makers

However, all of the teachers unanimously agreed that parent councils should be advisory and not decision making. It was the teachers who had to live with and work under the decisions that would be made. Therefore, teachers felt that they should have more of the decision-making powers first. Parent input has its place, but, due to their lack of day-to-day experience in the school, teachers stated that they were not to be given the control to make educational decisions. Parents and teachers were once again in almost complete agreement on this issue. It seemed parents had faith in letting the teachers and administrators make the decisions and teachers had faith in themselves. Teachers saw the need to have parents involved because of the positive effect it had on the students. However, both groups agreed that it was not yet time for parents to make decisions on such educational matters as listed in the previous section. The time was ripe for parent input and an increase in parent awareness of what goes on at the school on a day-to-day basis. This should be the focus of the parent council for this school should it be mandated.

Communication Between the School and Home

Teachers had a lot more to say than the parents did in this section. Teachers were asked about various methods of communication that were in place. Perhaps it was because sending newsletters, report cards, and holding interviews or conferences was considered an important part of a teacher's job.

On the issue of monthly newsletters, teachers like the parents, viewed the calendar which updated parents on all school events as the most important part of the newsletter for the parents. On the other hand, 4 of the teachers felt that the newsletters sent out by this school were too long and created a sense of information overload. Although parents mentioned that they did not always get through everything, they did not want the newsletter cut back because they preferred getting as much information as possible. So, in this case the teachers' perceptions of what the parents wanted in a newsletter were incorrect.

On the issue of report cards, each teacher had something that they would have liked to change about the report card. These included: a more extensive breakdown of areas within a subject, a report card that truly reflected the program, more anecdotes, and the inclusion of more categories for assessing student achievement and effort. Although none of the teachers were dissatisfied with the report card they were presently using, all had a notion of the ideal. Teachers saw the report card design as an ever evolving process if it were to remain a true assessment of student achievement and effort. Teachers also called for more conformity across grade levels and schools for assessing student achievement and effort to move further away from teacher subjectiveness in this area.

Like the parents, teachers stated that the interview or conference sessions held with

parents were most productive. They too saw this personal contact with parents as a powerful connection in the overall parent and school relationship. Parents were first and foremost concerned about how their child or children were doing in school? This would always be the basis for parent involvement. Some parents were ready to move beyond this connection but this would always be a critical factor in the overall relationship.

On an ending note, one teacher pointed out that not only was it time for parents to become more involved but it was also time "for teachers to feel that they are leaders and that they be given power to make decisions." This teacher pointed out that it was interesting that teachers often seemed to be the last to be considered on a number of major educational decisions. Would the implementors of policies for parent councils include a major role for the teachers of the school?

Overview of Parent and Teacher Surveys and Interviews

Many insights were gained by doing a survey followed by a more in-depth interview with both parents and teachers. Issues arose about parental awareness versus parental involvement. Did the two go hand in hand? Both parents and teachers of this school were already engaged in activities which were keeping parents informed and involved. How had this been achieved? This will briefly be addressed in Chapter 5.

Parents wanted to have greater input and they wanted to become more aware of what was going on in the schools. Parents wanted to know more about how educational decisions were being made and more about what goes on in the schools on a day-to-day basis. Were parent councils the way to help them have greater input and thereby, become

more aware of what was going on in the schools? Many factors arose such as how would parents from all socioeconomic-economic groups be represented on this council? How would working parents find the time to commit to such an undertaking? What guidelines would be put in place to prevent interest groups from lobbying for support and prevent arguing parent groups from disrupting or preventing the decision making process on certain issues?

Overall, in this school parents and teachers interviewed were in agreement on a number of issues regarding parent involvement. Both agreed that should parent councils be implemented, all of the councils should be advisory. However, if 11 parents were put on this council as suggested by the school board mandate (Peel Board of Education, 1995) there would not be equal representation by all involved and teachers considered this an important factor. What would happen if not enough parents came forward? To be a part of this council would be a huge undertaking and there would be no monetary reward for doing this job. The list goes on and on.

The interviews provided the researcher with some interesting insights. Not only did it substantiate the importance of building a strong home and school relationship, but talking to the parents about important educational issues allowed the researcher to see things from many different perspectives. Parents have many valid ideas and concerns about education. Parents wanted their children to succeed. Teachers have many valid ideas and concerns about education. Teachers wanted their students to succeed. Holding the interviews with these 10 parents and 6 teachers substantiated that the time was ripe for open communication of important educational issues between the two groups. These two groups

of parents and teachers who were interviewed were ready to talk and listen to each other but overall, they were not yet ready to sit down and make important educational decisions together. From the researcher's perspective what was needed then, were many different ways in which educational information could be passed between the home and school. Some methods were already in place in this school such as school success meetings, monthly school newsletters, and having an open door policy. Many more innovative methods were needed to make parents feel informed enough to help educators make important educational decisions.

It became clear that with so many factors to consider, this school as well as all schools involved in the process of increasing parent involvement in the school, would have to make a commitment based on principles that would ensure meaning and growth. Participatory democracy demanded such a commitment and not only did it ensure a meaningful base from which to start, but being committed to perpetuating a democratic society gave direction when confronted with the complex issues that surround parent involvement. Both Wood (1992) and Glickman (1993) have done extensive research on schools that work and renewing schools, respectively. They have given us information on how to establish a meaningful and functional connection between parents and the community. Chapter 5 will elaborate on this connection, thereby, offering some insight into addressing some of the questions and issues which arose from the results of the surveys and interviews in this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to look at how parents and teachers perceived the role of the parent in the governance of schools. To gain greater insight into this critical issue a triangulization method was used in which data was gathered through survey and interviews. This was enhanced through ongoing documentation of related events. One elementary school became the focus of the study. The first step in the study was to begin documenting significant school events and documenting articles and studies related to this topic.

Since the school involved in the study was a new school, the development of the parent and school relationship was documented. Steps taken to include parents in school life was an important aspect of how the parents and teachers of this particular school perceived the role of the parent. Was the school creating an inviting environment in which parents felt both personally and professionally involved? Did parents want this involvement? The second step was to send out surveys to both parents and teachers on the topic of parent involvement. The surveys were based on the parent questionnaire produced by Chavkin and Williams (1987). Responses were obtained by dividing the survey into six parts. The six parts produced data on the following: (a) general attitudes about parent involvement, (b) usefulness of having parents involved in specific school decisions, (c) interest in parent roles, (d) parent involvement in activities to date, (e) suggestions for improving parent involvement, and (f) a brief and anonymous profile.

Data generated from the surveys was used as a guide for developing questions for the

third step, namely, the interviews. Since survey results were limited to choices, it was hoped that greater depth into issues could be obtained through interviews with 10 parents and six teachers. As a result, responses on the survey in which parents were divided could be clarified. Perceptions of both teacher and parent responses that were unclear or varied were discussed more closely during the interview.

The interview was divided into four sections: (a) background and experience; (b) opinions on parent involvement issues; (c) opinions on the process, implementation, and usefulness of parent councils; and (d) knowledge and opinions on present communication methods between the school and the home.

Interview responses were summarized and then broken into themes or issues to generate conclusions about parent and teacher perceptions on the role of the parent in educational decision making. The themes came from the material gathered during the interviews. For example, when a number of parents began stating the same idea in a variety of different ways, then it was considered a significant theme and was recorded. Many of the parents interviewed at some point in the interview voiced that they felt it was important that they were made to feel welcome in the school or that they felt they could approach the teacher or principal about any issue. Thus, the importance of a school having an open door policy was reported on. Another theme that came through was the idea of having parents have a forum for voicing their opinions or concerns regarding educational issues. Many of the parents interviewed voiced that they felt parents could offer some different and important insights on certain educational decisions, so this too was an issue that was reported on. Through this process a number of insights were gained and will be reported on in the next

section.

Conclusions

The study began with ongoing documentation of significant school events. It became evident that steps had been taken to both personally and professionally invite parents into the school (Purkey & Novak, 1984). Although Purkey and Novak (1984) focus on how teachers can be personally and professionally inviting to their students, these concepts can be applied to how the teachers, the administration, and the office can take steps to be personally and professionally inviting to parents. By employing the four factors established by Purkey and Novak (1984) consisting of "(1) relating, (2) asserting, (3) investing, and (4) coping" (p. 78), this school had established an environment which was both personally and professionally inviting to parents.

For example, this school had managed to make parents feel welcome at all times as was attested to by all of the 10 parents who were interviewed. The staff lounge was open to any school visitors. The principal made it clear that he had an open door policy in which parents were welcome to drop in to discuss concerns or anything else of importance. All of the parents felt comfortable approaching a teacher either by phone or personally if a problem or concern about their child arose. This is an important element in the home/school relationship. Tagiuri, Bruner, and Black (1984) note that "the ways in which individuals relate to a group correlate highly with how much the individuals feel the group likes and respects them" (p. 81). Parents felt that their concerns and their presence was respected. Furthermore, the open door policy of the school made it easy for parents to assert themselves when they felt it was necessary. Parents were also invested to try new

experiences such as join the school success team in which they would become a part of discussing and setting goals for the school. Parent volunteers were invited to list activities that they would like to take part in. As a result, parents learned to cope with new situations. Their competency to partake in formal discussions increased as the school success meetings continued.

The ongoing documentation of significant school events highlighted some important factors in the overall move to have parents involved in educational decision making. The process has to start with the creation of an inviting personal and professional environment for parents. This idea relates directly to the work done by Purkey and Novak (1984) on creating an inviting family school. Invitational education as espoused by Purkey and Novak (1984) is based on developing "...educational environments that are anchored in attitudes of respect, care, and civility, and that promote positive relationships and encourage human potential" (p. 2). Once such a positive tone has been set it is much easier for teachers, the administration, and the parents to work together. Many of the teachers commented during the interviews on how much easier it was for them to relate to parents and have them involved in their classrooms because of the positive climate that had been created. Parent involvement must be incorporated into the school philosophy at all levels in order for it to be successful.

A pleasing environment has been created at this school. However, it is important to consider that the school is only 3 years old and so it is in its early stages of development. The effort to create such an inviting environment has been intentional but it has not been based on a direct approach such as Purkey and Novak's (1984) invitational

education approach. It will be interesting to see if this positive climate will sustain. To ensure a continuation of this positive climate in which a positive home and school relationship has been developed, it is suggested that some initiative be taken to implement a direct approach such as Purkey and Novak's (1984) invitational education approach. By doing so, it will give concrete direction and aid in the process of communicating and working with parents at all levels. Purkey and Novak (1984) describe invitational education as "a perceptually based, self-concept approach to the educative process" (p. 2). This process centers on four basic principles, three of which can be related to the involvement of parents in educational decision making.

- (1) People are able, valuable, and responsible and should be treated accordingly; ... (3) people possess relatively untapped potential in all areas of human development; and (4) this potential can best be realized by places, policies, and programs that are specifically designed to invite development... (Purkey & Novak, 1984, p. 2).

Purkey and Novak (1984) do not directly relate the invitational education approach to parent involvement in the schools but they focus on the relationship between teachers, students, and administrators. This relationship should now be expanded to include parents. The practice of the invitational education approach based on the previously listed basic principles will encourage a positive development of the move to include parents in educational decision making. It will not be enough to just open the doors to parents and invite them into the schools. Administrators and teachers will need to initiate the process with an awareness that is rooted in a consistent and developmental approach such as Purkey and Novak's (1984) invitational education approach.

The next step in this study involved sending out surveys to all of the parents and teachers of the school community. The survey, which was outlined in the previous section, was designed to provide information about parent interest and involvement in the schools from the perspective of parents and teachers. There was only a 32.8% survey return rate from parents. Initially, it was thought that parents would not be pressured to return surveys because a lack of return could in itself indicate a lack of interest in school issues on the parents part. However, because of other factors such as survey length and parents first experience with filling out such a survey, the low survey return rate did not necessarily indicate a lack of parent interest.

Wolfendale (1992) has developed emerging initiatives which promote parent involvement. Under her model of consultation she included surveys as an important consultation strategy for involving parents. That was the intent of this survey, however, the outcome was not as good as it could have been. Since this was the first time that parents were being consulted on a number of issues, the survey should have been made simpler by making it shorter. A number of parents commented during the interviews that they had not completed the survey because it looked like a lot of work. They put it aside to complete it but never got around to completing it. The survey could have been given out in two stages so that there would not have been so much to fill out at one time. Also, the purpose and intent of the survey should have been reviewed a number of times at PTA meetings and in school newsletters, not just in one covering letter, so that parents would have had the opportunity to become more aware of the importance of completing and returning the survey. Taking such steps could have improved the parent survey return rate, thereby

giving a more accurate community demographic description and a more accurate community profile on various parent involvement issues. Another factor to consider is to have more than one survey available to families in which parents wanted to fill out the survey separately. Added to this, a clearer demographic profile would also have been included in which a distinction was made between the female and male parent in order to improve upon the community profile and to see if there were significant differences in the perception of the role of the parent between female and male parents. This could only be assessed if there were enough survey returns from both male and female parents. Such an approach could force the issue of parent interest but the intent of the survey was to get information from parents. Such information is vital to a school when making a serious commitment to involving parents in the school.

Even though the parent survey return rate was low, the survey responses did provide some interesting information which was used to create a guideline for the interviews. In part one of the survey in which parents and teachers were asked to agree or disagree with 26 statements about attitudes to parent involvement, there were a number of statements on which parents were divided and teachers were divided. Parents were divided on statements about evaluating principals and parents needing to be trained before helping to make school decisions. Teachers were divided on statements about parents having the final word in decisions about their children's education. These statements were then incorporated into the interviews in order to gain insight into the reasoning behind the survey responses.

Other survey results which were helpful included the kinds of decisions in which

parents and teachers rated it useful to have parents involved in making them. Parents and teachers agreed with having parents involved in decisions about placing children in Special Education and the setting of school discipline rules. Parents were divided in their responses on a number of decisions such as evaluating principals. Teachers were also divided on a number of statements but the majority of parent and teacher survey responses indicated that parents should not be involved in the decision about firing school staff.

Therefore, the next step in this study was to interview 10 parents and 6 teachers in order to provide a forum for parents to deepen their responses. When parents were asked during the interviews about their specific opinions on having parents involved in school decisions, nine out of ten of the parents felt that parents could have input but that the decisions should be left up to the teachers and administrators. These 9 parents felt that should parent councils be mandated, they should be advisory and not decision making. The 6 teachers who were interviewed also agreed that parent councils should be advisory. Clearly, in this school, the time is not yet ripe for including parents in making decisions regarding the governance of the school. Therefore, as Glickman (1993) noted, as schools work on renewing themselves the developmental needs of each school will have to be considered. It will be ineffective to mandate the same changes for all schools. A school that is still rooted in using the authoritarian and advisory approach to making decisions will need to move slowly to using a collaborative approach. Glickman (1993) described the authoritarian and advisory approach as one in which "individuals and groups are told what they have to do in order to keep their jobs. People with formal authority and control over the professional lives of others make them do whatever is deemed best" (p. 83).

Glickman (1993) went on to describe the next step as the input-and-selection approach in which "individuals and groups are given a set of acceptable choices from which to select" (p. 84). Finally, "in the collaborative approach, no hierarchy of authority determines changes....Decisions are made through equal distribution of power" (Glickman, 1993, p. 84). It will be important for schools to assess teacher and parent perceptions of the role of the parent in educational decision making as part of the initial process to not only implement parent councils, but also to extend the parent and school relationship in all areas.

During the interviews with the parents, the parents indicated that they wanted to be made aware of how certain decisions were made such as how the school budget was set. They also wanted to become more aware of school operations both in the classrooms and outside of the classrooms. This parent interest in wanting more input and becoming more aware could account for some of the divided survey results. Parents may not have wanted to become more involved but wanted to have more information. Through the survey responses, it was left unclear whether parents wanted more involvement or not. During the interviews in which parents could respond more openly, many of the parents interviewed responded that they could see benefits in having parents give input on certain issues regarding the running of the school. Yet, only one parent agreed with having parents actually be involved with making the decisions. Parent interest was reflected in the survey results and parent input was reflected during the interviews.

Parent survey and interview responses reinforced that there are a number of types of parent involvement. Parents indicated their involvement at different levels as outlined by

Pearson (1990): (a) parents as audience, (b) parent as participator, (c) parent as worker or volunteer, and (d) parent as an educator in the home. Some parents wanted to move beyond the traditional role of the parent as an educator in the home, as an audience, and as a volunteer. They wanted to know more about how schools make decisions and how they are run. This interest did not necessarily mean that parents wanted to increase their participation whether it be an advisory role or one involving school governance. But it did indicate a desire to move beyond the role of audience, volunteer, and educator in the home. It is as if parents were describing a desire to become a part of an intermediary step between what has been the traditional role of the parent, namely, audience, volunteer, and educator in the home, to a more active or professional role in which parents sit on advisory boards or actually become involved in making educational decisions. It is a large leap from the traditional role of the parent in the school to that of decision maker. The results of the surveys and interviews in this study indicate that some parents are interested in initiating this leap by taking some small steps such as becoming more informed. It is up to the schools to encourage these steps by finding out what it is that parents want to know or become a part of and then delivering on these requests. This school could start by distributing information to those parents who wanted it on school budget, board initiatives, and other interests that were highlighted in the surveys and interviews.

Another significant issue which presented itself in this study was centered around the issue of implementing parent councils. During the interviews both parents and teachers were asked to give their opinions on a number of issues revolving around the idea of implementing parent councils. Six of the parents interviewed felt that if a parent were to

serve on a parent council for the school, it would be critical for them to spend a lot of time at the school to gain experience and knowledge of school procedures and operations. These results coincide with Caplan's (1995) claim that "only a tiny minority [of parents] want to have deeper involvement in their school's operation...." (p. 13). He went on to state that parents councils offer nothing to the majority of remaining parents who will not be involved.

Teachers were also adamant about parents meeting certain criteria before being chosen to serve on a parent council for the school. They made statements indicating that parents chosen to serve on the council should be highly informed about school operations and should have much previous experience with the school.

Therefore, the overall move to implement parent councils is supported by teachers and parents but the impact and practicality were questioned by both teachers and parents. Only a minority of parents will be involved. How will full-time working parents be represented? If principals are to begin consulting parents on issues such as school budget, school discipline policies, teacher evaluation, or curriculum, when and how will this quickly be accomplished? Both parents and teachers alluded to the idea that parent councils could create a new level of bureaucracy in which decisions could get bogged down.

Parents responded favourably to the idea of having input through school councils but is it sufficient to have a minority of parents involved? This leads one to question whether the mandating of parent councils is the best way to get parents involved in the school. It appears to be more of a maneuver initiated by politicians than by parents. Parents have

expressed a greater interest in becoming involved in school matters (Livingstone & Hart, 1993) but from the interviews conducted with these parents, the idea to implement parent councils was not something they were very familiar with until they were questioned about it.

Parent councils will not be the panacea for parent involvement. They will begin to involve a small minority of parents in matters to which they have been excluded to date, but what about the remaining parents? How will their interest be addressed?

Such insights showed that there were many variables to consider when discussing the move to have parents involved in the schools. Issues about representation, interest groups, knowledge of the school system, and developmental differences were some of the complexities that had to be dealt with. Something was needed to pull the issues together so that this school and all schools could begin working on resolving these issues from some common ground. This is where a focus on a democratic system of education becomes critical. Not only does it give purpose to education but it provides the grounding so that parent involvement is meaningful and functional. Participatory democracy calls for the participation of all citizens to make choices that are nondiscriminatory and nonrepressive to improve learning for all students. When schools realize their primary goal of preparing students to become active participants in a democratic society (Glickman, 1993), meaningful and functional parent involvement will also become part of this process.

Some parents and teachers voiced their concerns about the issue of too much variance between schools if parent councils are implemented, whether they be advisory or decision making. Although some broad policies and guidelines will need to be in place to ensure

that learning is going on in all schools, Glickman (1993) concluded that "we [will] need to have different treatments, because our concern should be with the fairness of results, not the sameness of treatment" (p. 115). The focus in schools should be about student learning, not from the perspective of standardized tests, science fairs, and competitions but from a democratic perspective in which students are able to participate, deliberate, and make choices. The primary goal as stated by Wood (1992), namely, to "nurture the attributes of democratic citizenship" (p. 79) will ensure a continuity between all schools while giving schools the freedom to work on the areas or secondary goals that they deem necessary and worthy.

Something that did not become clear through the survey and interview results was what purpose it would serve to have parents involved in educational decision making. As McAllister Swap (1987) claimed, "the evidence that parent involvement activities enhance children's school success is overwhelming" (p. 5). It was not the purpose of this study to enhance or dispute these findings. Although this is an important parent involvement issue, the main focus of this study was to deal with the issue of parent involvement in the governance of schools. As reported in Chapter 4, when parents and teachers were asked to respond to how they felt parent councils would impact the school, no reference was made to improved learning for students. Yet, this should be the focus for any changes or renewals that are to be undertaken. It seemed that both parents and teachers were more concerned with obstacles such as interest groups or lack of representation. Therefore, before parent councils are mandated or changes in parent involvement are made, a clear focus is needed.

What is needed is a renewed commitment to a democratic theory and practice of education. Only then does the purpose for including parents in educational decision making become clear. If as Glickman (1993) stated "the core goal of education is the preparation of students to become productive citizens in a democracy" (p. 51), then the purpose for including parents in educational decision making is for parents to carry out the role of a productive citizen.

Often the issue of parent involvement is presented in the media as something that is needed because of the poor state that public education is in. Parent involvement will be another way, with all of the other quick fix solutions, to ensure that students achieve good results on standardized tests and in competitions such as science and math fairs. But as Glickman (1993) argued,

what difference does it make if we graduate 100 percent of our students,...or if our students beat other countries in achievement in science when they have not learned how to identify, analyze, and solve the problems that face their immediate and larger communities? Our country would be better served by schools that produce caring, intelligent, and wise citizens who willingly engage in the work of a democracy than by schools that produce graduates who do well on isolated subgoals. (p. 9)

Therefore, before making a move to include parents in educational decision making, what is needed is an understanding of what the primary goal of each and every school is. The parents and teachers interviewed for this study did not present a clear vision of what the primary goal of each and every school is. Without such a commitment the move to include parents in making educational decisions becomes just another quick fix move with no real

direction or purpose behind it. Roles are created and parents are included but no real change is evident in the overall quality of the schools system.

For example, in the state of Florida, local school advisory committees were mandated in 1973 as part of the Florida Education and Finance Program (Zerchycov & others, 1980). In discussions with Maragret Sirianni (1995), a school board representative with the Lee County School District in Florida, it was learned that not until 1987, did each school in the Lee County District send a parent representative to the District level to serve on advisory committees. Presently, each school has representatives on a number of advisory committees such as budget advisory committee, curriculum advisory council, school site selection advisory committee (Lee School District, 1995, p. 5). Citizen advisory committees have been mandated for over 20 years and in some parts of Florida, they have been in effect for almost 10 years. Yet, little has been written on the effect they have had. It is difficult to find any information on how parent involvement has impacted the school system because their involvement has continued to be advisory. As Martin (1991) noted, if commitment to include parents is sincere then it must be rooted in legislation that gives parents a "...meaningful role in educational decision making" (p. 63) instead of just giving parents formal recognition. Advisory committees give parents recognition but they do not include parents in educational decision making.

This is not to say that advisory committees do not have a place in the process to include parents. As Glickman (1993) noted, developmental needs of schools will need to be considered in the renewal process. However, if there is no connection between the essence of public education, namely, "citizenship and democracy" (Glickman, 1993, p. 8)

and parent involvement in the schools, then the move to include parents in education will be just another move to appease public demand. This in turn will create token committees for parents instead of creating meaningful and functional roles for parents who are now ready to move beyond what has to date been their traditional role. This move may start in small steps such as increasing their awareness of educational issues but if each step is not rooted in the common democratic goal for all schools, then the move to involve parents in education will not have the impact that it could have.

Some may argue that there already is a democratic element in the school system which allows parents to have a voice through an elected representative, the school trustee. However, during the interviews not one parent made reference to the role of the school board trustee. Perhaps, it is because the trustee role has become so far removed to the individual parent. When you consider that in this school board there are 16 elected school trustees representing the over 100,000 students in 176 schools, the trustee role becomes a very weak link between the school and the home. The role of the trustee has served as the first step in involving parents through representation, but with such a gap in representation this role needs to be reassessed in the move to truly democratize schools.

Parents are ready for greater representation which will be achieved when parent councils are mandated and implemented for each school. As Caplan (1995) noted, only a minority of parents at each school will be involved, but the number of parent representatives serving on each council will increase parent involvement from what it has been. This second step to include parents in school decisions will be a move forward in citizen participation even though all parents will not be involved and parent councils will

be advisory, not decision making. The next step will be to have parents not only take on an advisory role but also a decision making role. This again will be a large step and the kinds of decisions parents will be involved in will have to be determined at the Ministry and board level. Thus, the move to democratize schools will be slow, evolving, and a day to day struggle. Yet, when the other options are considered, namely, to continue fumbling along and employing quick-fix solutions with no long-term goals in mind, instead of striving for meaning and purpose based on what public education was grounded on, to nurture and foster a democratic society, then it becomes obvious that there are no worthier options.

Having a sincere commitment to a democratic theory and practice of education will help resolve the next issue which presented itself in this study. As one teacher who was interviewed stated, "Isn't it ironic that boards are considering involving parents in making decisions in areas where teachers have not yet had the power to do so?" It is often the teachers who are ignored in the entire educational process. School Boards make decisions, principals make decisions, political parties campaign for votes, but are teachers being heard? Little has been written about teacher perceptions of the role of the parents, yet interestingly, they are a critical factor in the parent/school relationship.

Wood (1992) referred to this exclusion of teachers as decision makers in educational matters as 'teacherproofing'. Wood (1992) defined this term as what districts mandate, usually as a response to public demands, with the outcome being telling teachers more and more of what and how they should teach. He went on to show how crucial it is for teachers to be trusted and respected as valuable members of the school system because "we cannot

justifiably expect teachers to treat students with more respect than that which they themselves receive" (Wood, 1992, p. 250). This taken a step further infers that teachers cannot be expected to treat parents with more respect and trust if they themselves do not receive such trust and respect. Teachers are a necessary and valuable resource in the parent and school relationship. Any move to include parents should include teachers. Common sense dictates that not only would this be the democratic thing to do but including teachers includes the educators who to date have had the most contact with parents on a consistent basis.

Five of the 6 teachers interviewed in this study were eager to include parents, however, they expressed the need to have policies or guidelines in place regarding parent involvement. What type of specific policies or guidelines are needed was not discussed during this interview, but it is definitely something that teachers should have input into since they deal with the parents on a day-to-day basis. Teachers insights will help create meaningful policies and guidelines.

Earlier on in this chapter a reference was made to Purkey and Novak's (1984) invitational approach for creating an inviting family school. To coincide with this approach, Purkey (n.d.) has created a process which can be used by teachers, administrators, and parents of a school so that they can begin to establish the necessary guidelines and policies. He calls it the 5-P Relay: An Exciting Way to Create an Inviting School. It is based on "...the global nature of schools, the entire school gestalt made up of Processes, Programs, Policies, Places, and People" (Purkey, n.d., p. 1). Purkey goes on to outline how this process can be implemented and this will be elaborated on in the

next section of this chapter. The important point for now is that there are ways to include everyone in the making of effective policies and guidelines. The 5-P Relay is such a way because it is based on invitational thinking which in turn is based in a democratic theory of education. As Novak (1992) noted,

Invitational thinking depends on and seeks to develop caring, reflective practitioners with the know-how and persistence necessary to develop, structure, and sustain educational environments that dependably call forth the worthwhile possibilities of all participants. This is its intentionality. This is also deeply connected to the intentionality of a democratic society envisioned by John Dewey. For Dewey, democracy was not merely a political form, but an ideal for communicative living that affirmed the worth, dignity, and possibilities of each person and necessitated the creation of forms of life that supported this ideal. (p. 248)

Robertson (1992) has written a paper asking if Dewey's Educational Vision is Still Viable? Not only is it viable but it is necessary because as Wood (1992) stated, "lasting change will take a deep commitment to the daily work of making schools the component of democratic life that they were intended to be" (p. 230). The implications of this statement go far beyond parent involvement in educational decision making. It shows that this issue is an integral part of a much larger movement, a need to renew a commitment to a democratic theory and practice of education.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

As discussed in the conclusion section of this chapter, a critical factor in the move to

include parents in educational decision making is rooted in a democratic theory and practice of education. Dewey (1916) presented an educational philosophy based on democratic principles. For Dewey, since democracy is a moral theory based on the principle of active involvement of all members in the political, economical, and social affairs of society, it is an evolving process which can and should be applied to education. For as Robertson (1992) argued,

Communities, [including school communities] in which all share in the creation and enjoyment of common goods, in which each person's flourishing is thought necessary for the full flourishing of the others and the individuality of each is respected, and in which conflicts are brought out in the open and resolved through public discourse surely are a worthy goal. (p. 374)

Dewey (1916) concluded that there can be no other way than to join democracy and education to ensure a perpetuation of the democratic way of life in which moral, social, economic, and political issues are deliberated upon by all of society and not just a select few. It is Dewey's (1916) reference to all of society which holds significance for this study because it shows that the move to include parents in educational decision making is rooted in democratic principles. Therefore, the first factor that should be present when initiating parent involvement in the governance of schools is that this move be firmly grounded in democratic principles. This commitment to perpetuating a democratic way of life will positively influence all factors and issues that arise as parents deepen their involvement in educational issues. Glickman (1993) clarified this point by stating that "what the belief in democracy does is to ensure that the issues of our society are issues that

citizens care about, participate in resolving, and take responsibility for" (p. 155).

Once this connection between democracy and education has firmly been established in all areas, including the area of parent involvement, practical strategies and processes are needed to begin and guide the actions of those involved. Purkey and Novak (1984) provided a practical approach for beginning the process of establishing a positive relationship between the school and the home. The survey and interview results of this study indicated that establishing a positive relationship between the school and home was an important step in involving the parents in the school. Although Purkey and Novak's (1984) process of creating an inviting family school referred to administrators, teachers, and students, it can now be extended to parents. Purkey and Novak (1984) described invitational education as a practice that,

is based on an understanding of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and institutional messages intended/not intended, extended/not extended, received/not received, acted upon/not acted upon. This understanding is used to develop educational environments that are anchored in attitudes of respect, care, and civility, and that promote positive relationships and encourage human potential. (p. 2)

This is a complex process and it is not the intent to outline all of the details of implementing this process at this time. If a deeper understanding of this process is needed then reference can be made to Purkey and Novak's (1984) work. The purpose of referring to it in this study is to stress that educators need to intentionally make schools inviting for parents in both personal and professional ways. Schools will be able to establish a positive relationship without this approach as the school in this study did, however, if this

relationship is to deepen and sustain, then schools will need to use specific approaches to encourage such growth. Since this approach is connected to a democratic way of life as outlined in the conclusion section of this chapter, it can be an important first step in the development of the school and home relationship as parents become more involved in educational issues and decisions.

Parent councils are one way in which some parents can become more involved in educational issues and decisions. Issues such as school discipline policies, homework policies, as well as school budget decisions can be addressed. Through a parent council, a minority of parents in each of the schools of Ontario can be involved in educational matters in a way in which they have never been involved to date. Teachers and parents surveyed and interviewed for this study indicated an interest in setting up parent councils. They also voiced concerns about how parent councils can be set up and operated to ensure meaningful and functional practices by all involved. Furthermore, now that advisory parent councils have been mandated to be effect in all schools in Ontario as of September, 1996, the need for a process to include parents formally is more important than ever. Purkey (n.d.) has created a process which can be expanded from use within the school by teachers and administrators to use on a broader level to include parents and the community. He calls it the 5-P Relay: An Exciting Way to Create an Inviting School. It is based on "...the global nature of schools, the entire school gestalt make up of Processes, Programs, Policies, Places. and People" (p. 1). The outcome will be a list of goals applicable to each of the five headings, a list of procedures for achieving the goals, a list of the obstacles which might prevent the goals and procedures, a list of ways to overcome these obstacles,

and a list of suggestions to evaluate goal achievement. This provides an excellent framework for defining the role that the parent can have in making decisions about education and school management. Administrators who are reluctant can begin with minor issues such as lunch rules and routines and build a trusting and caring relationship with the parents of the community before delving into bigger issues. It should be stressed that this too is a lengthy and difficult process and should not be rushed. It involves the task of moving from what Novak and Webster (1986) as "public relations to public creations" (p. 1), meaning parents will eventually be involved in the area of policy development as it relates to education. This too is a very complex process involving "(1) problem definition, (2) determination of evaluation criteria, (3) identification of alternatives, (4) evaluation of alternatives, (5) comparison of alternatives and (6) assessment of outcomes" (Patton & Sawicki, 1986, p. 25). Novak and Webster (1986) demonstrated how this approach to policy development can be applied to the classroom, the boardroom and provincial situations. Although we do not have the time to show its direct application here, the implications are encouraging when dealing with school and community connections.

Purkey and Novak's (1984) invitational approach for creating an inviting family schools, Purkey's (n.d.) 5-P Relay for establishing, striving for, and evaluating school goals, and Novak and Webster's (1986) process for policy development also provide a way to resolve another issue which presented itself during the interviews with parents and teachers. Both the parents and teachers interviewed in this study voiced their concerns about including parents in educational decision making because they felt that in general, the parents lacked the knowledge about the school system and lacked the skills needed to

deliberate important educational decisions. As a result, parents would be unable to make informed and effective decisions. However, when direct approaches and strategies, as listed at the beginning of this paragraph are implemented, then an avenue has been created for parents to be involved and at the same time acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to help them make informed and effective decisions. Once again, it must be stressed that it will not be an easy task for schools to implement such approaches and strategies, but it is a necessity if schools are serious about making parent involvement meaningful and functional.

Once parents and educators are ready to make decisions together, the next step will be to ensure that policies on parent involvement are legislated to give parents a meaningful and functional role instead of just formal recognition (Martin, 1991). As Martin (1991) noted, criteria such as clear objectives and proper funding will need to be in place, not at the school level, but at the Ministry and board levels, to ensure authentic parent participation in educational decision making. The parents and teachers interviewed in this study were not ready for a decision-making partnership, but educators should be aware of where they are heading and begin preparing themselves now for decision-making parent councils. Such a focus will help ensure the employment of meaningful and functional practices along the way to having parents involved in the governance of schools.

The last important issues which surfaced during this study revolved around the idea that involving parents through the implementation of parent councils would be just one way to involve a small number of parents from each school. How can the remaining parents get more involved or be made more aware of what goes on in the schools? In his article

entitled, "Schools are no place for parent councils", Caplan (1995) suggests that "principals and teachers must invite parents to share their concerns about their kids' progress. And all educators must actively work to teach parents exactly how they can better support their children's schooling at home" (p. 13).

The school in this study has initiated the process of becoming active in working with parents on how they can better support their children's schooling. In the 1994/95 school year, parents were invited to attend formal and informal meetings as part of the school success team meetings. Furthermore, sessions were set up with two of the other neighbouring K to 6 elementary schools on positive parenting. Tapes and books written by Barbara Colorosso were reviewed and discussed. A social worker was present, as well as the vice-principal and some teachers.

During this school year, an evening on early literacy is being planned in which parents will be exposed to what the research has to say about the effect of the home environment on children's reading. In Doake's (1988) words, "the sooner we start reading to children, the easier it is for reading to become an integral part of their daily lives" (p. 24). One teacher who is very interested in this topic will share her knowledge, her literature and her insights on this topic. She will also encourage parents to share their knowledge and insights on this topic.

These types of sessions have opened the door for more parents to be involved and for teachers and parents to discuss topics of interest. The positive parent/school relationship that has been developed in this particular school did not just happen. The initiative was taken by the school and the parents have responded. However, a large number of parents

have still not been reached. What else can be done? Wood (1992) suggested that "if the mission of public education is to make democracy possible, then a spirit of public service, of commitment to the community, must be part of the school's mission" (p. 216).

There are different types of parent involvement as stated earlier, parent as audience, parent as participator, parent as volunteer, and parent as an educator in the home (Pearson, 1990). Just as different approaches will be needed to meet the developmental needs of the schools, different approaches will be needed to meet the developmental needs of the parents. The goal will be to reach parents at whatever level they are at and encourage growth. This will not be an easy task but it takes the pressure off to expect all parents to suddenly become involved in educational decision making. Some parents are ready to take the step to become more actively involved in the school and so the opportunity should be provided even if it is just a small minority. However, this does not mean that all of the other parents should be ignored since they will now be represented by the parents on the councils. Educators will need to look at various educational issues and practices and determine how they can begin to include parents.

For example, how can we get parents thinking about early literacy and ways of supporting their child's learning before their children ever get to school? One suggestion could be to find a way for local businesses to be involved in providing reading care packages to families with infants or toddlers. Another suggestion could be to have local businesses provide library cards for parents with toddlers. It would be good for their business and invaluable to the families involved. Much is being written about having community businesses involved in the schools but it is usually at the secondary level.

Coop programs are an excellent link between the school and the community but this relationship should be started right from the beginning. Although toddler children will not directly impact the business world the long term ramifications of such involvement could be phenomenal.

Taking this a step further, educators in the public school systems could help the drive to have local businesses help provide quality daycare for its employees and the local community. Learning and growing is not just something that happens within the walls of the schools. Such commitment to quality care starting at an early age, well before students enter the school system, could help foster a school climate of success that all parents and teachers are striving for. The potential for having the community and the schools working together is endless. Such working together helps create what Wood (1992) defined as a school spirit that is necessary for all good schools. He refers to school spirit as something that,

means a commitment on the part of all of those involved in the school-students, teachers, administrators, and parents-to an all-inclusive community, one that honors diversity, finds strength in collaborative action, and shares the triumphs and sorrows of each of its members. (p. 102)

In a democratic society the school and community are no longer seen as two separate places to learn and grow. Although the school community and surrounding community are separate physically, the overlap is much greater. No longer is it solely the school's job to educate youngsters but it becomes a process involving the entire community.

The move to involve the community can start by making parents more aware. One way

to do this seems very obvious but has not happened to date. The newspaper, which has been an effective way of communicating to a community for a number of years, has never had a section in it that is written by educators. Reporters who claim to have had some experience in education or claim to have an interest in education have always reported on educational issues. Citizens and educators have often contributed articles in the opinion section. But, why have school boards not been approached to include a weekly section in which educational issues are presented from the perspective of educators? It is definitely time for us to speak up, not through our education ministers, or board trustees but through the principals and teachers who work in the system day to day. We are a group of dedicated, capable, and approachable educators who have a lot of positive things to say about what is going on in public education. It is time for us not only to express the positive things that are going on but to also address the shortcomings out in the open. The school system is not a perfect system but it is an evolving system and we need to make the public aware of this. Parents could provide input into the types of things they would like addressed. Parents could help ensure that educators use understandable language and stay away from educational jargon.

We need an Ann Landers of education. Education is such a critical factor in every parent's child and we need to look for different ways of addressing parent concerns. Would this trivialize educational matters or just make it more accessible and readable to many of the parents who are not yet involved in educational matters? It would certainly increase talk amongst parents and educators and that could be a start.

Clearly, there is no one perfect way to get parents and the school working together.

Parent councils are a way for a small group of parents to be involved in a certain way. However, we need to be creative and explore as many ways as possible to make the majority of parents more aware and more involved in their child's education. In this school, parents and teachers are not ready to make educational decisions together, but they are ready to develop a deeper partnership based on the need to help every child succeed in school. As Wood (1992) stated,

Why don't we start tomorrow to make our schools, the democratic communities they all could be? And while we're at it, let's make sure that the school we know best, the school down the street, becomes a place from which we can expect the neighbours we need if democratic community is ever to be possible. (p. 256)

It is this striving for creating democratic schools and communities that will ensure meaningful and functional parent involvement in educational decision making.

Implications for Further Research

This study clarified certain perceptions of the role of the parent from the perspective of both parents and teachers but was limited to one elementary school. To further clarify these perceptions, a number of schools with varying backgrounds could be studied to substantiate some of this findings. A broader study could include researching an established school, a school with a high ESL (English as a Second Language) factor, and a school in which opposing parent groups are already in operation. Such insight is needed to ensure that meaningful policies are established at the Ministry level.

Since the schools in this board are moving towards implementing parent councils by the

end of the 1995/96 school year, another focus could be to follow this implementation procedure in a number of schools with different backgrounds as listed in the previous paragraph. Such a study could point out the effectiveness of implementing these parent councils. The question to be posed could be: is the move to create parent councils part of a sincere commitment to a democratic theory and practice of education or, is it just another initiative to appease a minority of parents who will be able to participate in this process? Are the parent councils meeting the varying developmental needs of the schools?

Another focus could be to study a number of other alternatives to having parents involved besides parent councils. One suggestion could involve setting up an early literacy program in which parents are involved in educational issues before their child is old enough to attend school. Another suggestion could be to approach a local newspaper to include a weekly educational issue. This could include articles written by principals, teachers, aides, and other involved educators. It could also include a column in which parents can write in questions, concerns, or comments; creating an Ann Landers column of education.

A final suggestion could be to do a study on the profiles of parents who come forward and are elected to serve on the parent councils. Such a study could reveal if parents from various demographic groups are being represented. It could also help educators gain insights into what motivated these parents to undertake such a task.

Given the present economic climate in which predictions are being made by education newspaper reporters, such as Duffy (1996), that the current education minister is planning to make cutbacks to the education system that may hit the \$1 billion mark, it is critical that

parents become more involved. This involvement and partnership between home and school may be the critical factor in helping to continue the road to success in education for all involved. Educators will need the parents to continue the fight for quality education and parents will need the educators to inform them of how best this can be achieved for their own children and all children.

Parent involvement is here to stay. This study has attempted to highlight some perceptions about parent involvement in educational decision making in order to assess where the move to have parents involved is and where it is heading. The need to bring the parents and the school together has never been greater. However, it is important that where we go from here is rooted in democratic principles and that it is not just a reaction to political agendas or economic woes. The people who are affected by the system on a day-to-day basis, namely, parents, teachers, and students will need to continue the open communication. This will lead to innovative solutions far beyond parent councils so that the role of the parent in educational decision making becomes a positive force in the ongoing quest for quality education. The opportunities are endless. However, further study is required to ensure that these opportunities remain meaningful and invite growth for all who are involved; students, parents, and educators. At the core of this pursuit, let us remember that as Glickman (1993) stated

the essential value of the public school in a democracy, from the beginning, was to ensure an educated citizenry capable of participating in discussions, debates, and decisions to further the wellness of the larger community and protect the individual right to 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.' An educated citizenry and a democracy were one and the same, the lack of one would imperil the other. (pp. 8-9)

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APPENDIX A: PARENT SURVEY ON PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Part I

There are many different ideas about whether parents should be involved in their children's education. Some of these ideas are listed below. Please tell how much you either agree or disagree with each of these ideas. For these questions there are no right or wrong answers. Just tell us what you think.

HOW MUCH DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE
WITH EACH STATEMENT WHICH FOLLOWS?
CIRCLE THE NUMBER OF YOUR ANSWER.

<u>Statements</u>	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>
1. Teachers should give parents ideas about helping with children's school work at home.....	1	2	3	4
2. Teachers should take charge of getting parents involved in education.....	1	2	3	4
3. Teachers have enough to do without also having to work with parents.....	1	2	3	4
4. Teachers should be trained for working with parents.....	1	2	3	4
5. Parents should evaluate principals.....	1	2	3	4
6. Parents should evaluate teachers.....	1	2	3	4
7. Principals should be in charge of getting parents involved in the schools.....	1	2	3	4
8. Parents want teachers to send more information home about classroom teaching activities.....	1	2	3	4

<u>Statements</u>	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>
9. Parents usually feel at ease when they come to school.....	1	2	3	4
10. Parents have a hard time teaching reading or mathematics to their children.....	1	2	3	4
11. Parents should help children with their homework.....	1	2	3	4
12. Parents are not trained to help make school decisions.....	1	2	3	4
13. Parents should make sure that children do their homework.....	1	2	3	4
14. Working parents do not have time to be involved in school matters.....	1	2	3	4
15. More parents would help at home if they knew what to do.....	1	2	3	4
16. Parents should have the final word in decisions about their children's education.....	1	2	3	4
17. Parents should be responsible for getting involved in their childrens' schools.....	1	2	3	4
18. Parents would help their children with school work if they had more time.....	1	2	3	4
19. Parents should not try to help their children with homework assignments.....	1	2	3	4
20. Parents have little to do with their children's success in school.....	1	2	3	4

<u>Statements</u>	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>
21. Children should have more homework assignments.....	1	2	3	4
22. School assignments interrupt family life at home. 1		2	3	4
23. Teachers should ask parents to work with their children on specific assignments.....	1	2	3	4
24. Parents need to be trained before helping to make school decisions.....	1	2	3	4
25. Parent councils with a select number of parents are an effective way to include parents in making school decisions.....	1	2	3	4
26. Teachers need to be trained to make decisions with parents.....	1	2	3	4

Part II

Listed below are some of the decisions which teachers and school principals often face. Some people feel it would be useful for parents to have a say in these decisions. Others feel these decisions should be made by school staff and that parents should not have a say.

Please indicate how useful you think it would be to have parents involved in making each of the following decisions.

HOW USEFUL DO YOU THINK IT IS FOR
PARENTS TO BE INVOLVED IN THESE DECISIONS?
CIRCLE THE NUMBER OF YOUR ANSWER

<u>Decisions</u>	<u>Not Useful</u>	<u>Somewhat Useful</u>	<u>Very Useful</u>
1. Amount of homework assigned.....	1	2	3
2. Choosing classroom discipline methods.....	1	2	3
3. Selecting textbooks and learning materials.....	1	2	3
4. Placing children in Special Education.....	1	2	3
5. Evaluating children's progress.....	1	2	3
6. Hiring school staff.....	1	2	3
7. Evaluating teacher performance.....	1	2	3
8. Deciding what's most important for the school budget.....	1	2	3
9. Firing school staff.....	1	2	3
10. Including more multicultural education in the school.....	1	2	3
11. Setting school discipline rules.....	1	2	3

<u>Decisions</u>	<u>Not Useful</u>	<u>Somewhat Useful</u>	<u>Very Useful</u>
12. Setting rules for grading students.....	1	2	3
13. Designing the report card.....	1	2	3
14. Evaluating grade level programs.....	1	2	3
15. Assessing student academic needs	1	2	3

Part III

Parents may be involved in their children's education in many ways. Listed below are 7 kinds of roles parents can play in the education process. Parents may prefer one role over the others or may prefer different roles at different times.

Please read each role described below and indicate how much interest you have in being involved that way in education. Interest does not necessarily mean commitment.

HOW MUCH ARE YOU INTERESTED IN BEING INVOLVED IN EDUCATION AS DESCRIBED IN EACH OF THE ROLES BELOW? CIRCLE THE NUMBER OF YOUR ANSWER			
<u>Roles</u>	<u>Not at all</u> <u>Interested</u>	<u>Somewhat</u> <u>Interested</u>	<u>Very</u> <u>Interested</u>
PAID SCHOOL STAFF - working in the school either full time or part time as an aide, parent educator, assistant teacher, assistant librarian, or other assisting role.....	1	2	3
SCHOOL PROGRAM SUPPORTER - coming to the school to assist in events; for example, chaperoning a celebration or field trip, taking tickets at a fund-raising event, or similar.....	1	2	3
HOME TUTOR - helping your child at home to learn school work or other educational materials.....	1	2	3
AUDIENCE - supporting your child in school by going to school performances, baking for bake sales, responding to messages and announcements from the school.....	1	2	3
ADVOCATE - asking for changes in certain rules or practices in the school or in the school system.....	1	2	3
COLEARNER - going to classes or workshops with teachers and principals where everyone learns more about children and education.....	1	2	3
DECISION MAKER - taking part in school decisions by being on an advisory board, a school committee, or parent council; or by giving your opinions to these boards or committees.....	1	2	3

Part IV

Here are some examples of activities which involve parents in their children's education. Some of these take place at home while others are done at school.

Please indicate how often you usually take part in each of the types of activities listed below.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU USUALLY TAKE
PART IN THESE TYPES OF ACTIVITIES?
CIRCLE THE NUMBER OF YOUR ANSWER

<u>Activities</u>	<u>Never</u>	<u>Rarely</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>Often</u>
1. Helping children with school assignments at home.....	1	2	3	4
2. Visiting the school to see what goes on in the classroom.....	1	2	3	4
3. Going to open house or "follow your child's schedule" activities at the school.....	1	2	3	4
4. Attending classes at school which help you teach your children at home.....	1	2	3	4
5. Helping with money-raising activities to pay for school needs.....	1	2	3	4
6. Going to coffees, pot-luck suppers, etc., at your child's school.....	1	2	3	4
7. Teaching your own children at home.....	1	2	3	4
8. Helping teachers with classroom learning activities.....	1	2	3	4
9. Helping in the school library, reading center, playground, lunchroom, or office.....	1	2	3	4
10. Going with children and teachers on school field trips or picnics, or other special events.	1	2	3	4

<u>Activities</u>	<u>Never</u>	<u>Rarely</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>Often</u>
11. Attending workshops or other educational activities for parents at the school.....	1	2	3	4
12. Taking part in planning the school budget..	1	2	3	4
13. Helping to plan what will be taught at the school.....	1	2	3	4
14. Helping to write the school's educational goals.....	1	2	3	4
15. Helping evaluate school programs.....	1	2	3	4
16. Helping to evaluate school staff.....	1	2	3	4
17. Participating in the decisions to hire or fire school staff.....	1	2	3	4
18. Helping to evaluate students' progress.....	1	2	3	4
19. Going to parent/teacher conferences about your child's work.....	1	2	3	4
20. Giving school board or school administration ideas for rule changes in the school or school district.....	1	2	3	4
21. Going to parent/teacher meetings as part of P.T.A. meetings, curriculum evenings, or other special school program.....	1	2	3	4

Part V

What do you think teachers and administrators could do to increase the level of parent involvement in their schools? Listed below are some suggestions which have been offered.

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of these suggestions.

WHICH OF THESE SUGGESTIONS WOULD WORK
TO GET PARENTS INVOLVED IN SCHOOLS?
CIRCLE THE NUMBER OF YOUR ANSWER

<u>Suggestions</u>	<u>Strongly</u> <u>Disagree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Strongly</u> <u>Agree</u>
1. Send more information to parents about ways they could become involved.....	1	2	3	4
2. Make parents feel more welcome at school....	1	2	3	4
3. Help parents to better understand the subjects being taught at school.....	1	2	3	4
4. Have informal meetings where parents, and school staff can get to know each other.....	1	2	3	4
5. Ask parents how they would like to be involved in education.....	1	2	3	4
6. Giving parents "assignments" they can do at home with their children.....	1	2	3	4
7. Having more projects where parents and teachers are working with each other.....	1	2	3	4
8. Giving parents more information about their child's successes in school.....	1	2	3	4
9. Planning school activities for parents at times when working parents can attend.....	1	2	3	4
10. Having activities include the children along with the parents and teachers.....	1	2	3	4
11. Other _____				

6. Amount of Education you have completed:

- ☐ Gr. 12
- ☐ Gr. 13
- ☐ College Degree
- ☐ Bachelors Degree
- ☐ Masters Degree
- ☐ Other

7. How much time do you work at a job outside of your family responsibilities?

- ☐ full time
- ☐ part time
- ☐ not at all

8. How much time does your spouse work at a job outside of your family responsibilities?

- ☐ full time
- ☐ part time
- ☐ not at all

APPENDIX B: TEACHER SURVEY ON PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Part I

There are many different ideas about whether parents should be involved in their children's education. Some of these ideas are listed below. Please tell how much you either agree or disagree with each of these ideas. For these questions there are no right or wrong answers. Just tell us what you think.

HOW MUCH DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE
WITH EACH STATEMENT WHICH FOLLOWS?
CIRCLE THE NUMBER OF YOUR ANSWER.

<u>Statements</u>	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>
1. Teachers should give parents ideas about helping with children's school work at home.....	1	2	3	4
2. Teachers should take charge of getting parents involved in education.....	1	2	3	4
3. Teachers have enough to do without also having to work with parents.....	1	2	3	4
4. Teachers should be trained for working with parents.....	1	2	3	4
5. Parents should evaluate principals.....	1	2	3	4
6. Parents should evaluate teachers.....	1	2	3	4
7. Principals should be in charge of getting parents involved in the schools.....	1	2	3	4
8. Parents want teachers to send more information home about classroom teaching activities.....	1	2	3	4

<u>Statements</u>	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>
9. Parents usually feel at ease when they come to school.....	1	2	3	4
10. Parents have a hard time teaching reading or mathematics to their children.....	1	2	3	4
11. Parents should help children with their homework.....	1	2	3	4
12. Parents are not trained to help make school decisions.....	1	2	3	4
13. Parents should make sure that children do their homework.....	1	2	3	4
14. Working parents do not have time to be involved in school matters.....	1	2	3	4
15. More parents would help at home if they knew what to do.....	1	2	3	4
16. Parents should have the final word in decisions about their children's education.....	1	2	3	4
17. Parents should be responsible for getting involved in their childrens' schools.....	1	2	3	4
18. Parents would help their children with school work if they had more time.....	1	2	3	4
19. Parents should not try to help their children with homework assignments.....	1	2	3	4
20. Parents have little to do with their children's success in school.....	1	2	3	4

<u>Statements</u>	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>
21. Children should have more homework assignments.....	1	2	3	4
22. School assignments interrupt family life at home. 1		2	3	4
23. Teachers should ask parents to work with their children on specific assignments.....	1	2	3	4
24. Parents need to be trained before helping to make school decisions.....	1	2	3	4
25. Parent councils with a select number of parents are an effective way to include parents in making school decisions.....	1	2	3	4
26. Teachers need to be trained to make decisions with parents.....	1	2	3	4

Part II

Listed below are some of the decisions which teachers and school principals often face. Some people feel it would be useful for parents to have a say in these decisions. Others feel these decisions should be made by school staff and that parents should not have a say.

Please indicate how useful you think it would be to have parents involved in making each of the following decisions.

HOW USEFUL DO YOU THINK IT IS FOR
PARENTS TO BE INVOLVED IN THESE DECISIONS?
CIRCLE THE NUMBER OF YOUR ANSWER

<u>Decisions</u>	<u>Not Useful</u>	<u>Somewhat Useful</u>	<u>Very Useful</u>
1. Amount of homework assigned.....	1	2	3
2. Choosing classroom discipline methods.....	1	2	3
3. Selecting textbooks and learning materials.....	1	2	3
4. Placing children in Special Education.....	1	2	3
5. Evaluating children's progress.....	1	2	3
6. Hiring school staff.....	1	2	3
7. Evaluating teacher performance.....	1	2	3
8. Deciding what's most important for the school budget.....	1	2	3
9. Firing school staff.....	1	2	3
10. Including more multicultural education in the school.....	1	2	3
11. Setting school discipline rules.....	1	2	3

<u>Decisions</u>	<u>Not Useful</u>	<u>Somewhat Useful</u>	<u>Very Useful</u>
12. Setting rules for grading students.....	1	2	3
13. Designing the report card.....	1	2	3
14. Evaluating grade level programs.....	1	2	3
15. Assessing student academic needs	1	2	3

Part III

Parents may be involved in their children's education in many ways. Listed below are 7 kinds of roles parents can play in the education process. Parents may prefer one role over the others or may prefer different roles at different times.

Please read each role described below and indicate how much interest you think parents have in being involved that way in education. Interest does not necessarily mean commitment.

HOW MUCH DO YOU THINK PARENTS ARE INTERESTED IN BEING INVOLVED IN EDUCATION AS DESCRIBED IN EACH OF THE ROLES BELOW? CIRCLE THE NUMBER OF YOUR ANSWER			
<u>Roles</u>	<u>Not at all</u> <u>Interested</u>	<u>Somewhat</u> <u>Interested</u>	<u>Very</u> <u>Interested</u>
PAID SCHOOL STAFF - working in the school either full time or part time as an aide, parent educator, assistant teacher, assistant librarian, or other assisting role.....	1	2	3
SCHOOL PROGRAM SUPPORTER - coming to the school to assist in events; for example, chaperoning a celebration or field trip, taking tickets at a fund-raising event, or similar.....	1	2	3
HOME TUTOR - helping your child at home to learn school work or other educational materials.....	1	2	3
AUDIENCE - supporting your child in school by going to school performances, baking for bake sales, responding to messages and announcements from the school.....	1	2	3
ADVOCATE - asking for changes in certain rules or practices in the school or in the school system.....	1	2	3
COLEARNER - going to classes or workshops with teachers and principals where everyone learns more about children and education.....	1	2	3
DECISION MAKER - taking part in school decisions by being on an advisory board, a school committee, or parent council; or by giving your opinions to these boards or committees.....	1	2	3

Part IV

Here are some examples of activities which involve parents in their children's education. Some of these take place at home while others are done at school.

Please indicate how often you think parents usually take part in each of the types of activities listed below.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU THINK PARENTS
USUALLY TAKE PART IN THESE TYPES OF ACTIVITIES?
CIRCLE THE NUMBER OF YOUR ANSWER

<u>Activities</u>	<u>Never</u>	<u>Rarely</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>Often</u>
1. Helping children with school assignments at home.....	1	2	3	4
2. Visiting the school to see what goes on in the classroom.....	1	2	3	4
3. Going to open house or "follow your child's schedule" activities at the school.....	1	2	3	4
4. Attending classes at school which help you teach your children at home.....	1	2	3	4
5. Helping with money-raising activities to pay for school needs.....	1	2	3	4
6. Going to coffees, pot-luck suppers, etc., at your child's school.....	1	2	3	4
7. Teaching your own children at home.....	1	2	3	4
8. Helping teachers with classroom learning activities.....	1	2	3	4
9. Helping in the school library, reading center, playground, lunchroom, or office.....	1	2	3	4
10. Going with children and teachers on school field trips or picnics, or other special events.	1	2	3	4

<u>Activities</u>	<u>Never</u>	<u>Rarely</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>Often</u>
11. Attending workshops or other educational activities for parents at the school.....	1	2	3	4
12. Taking part in planning the school budget..	1	2	3	4
13. Helping to plan what will be taught at the school.....	1	2	3	4
14. Helping to write the school's educational goals.....	1	2	3	4
15. Helping evaluate school programs.....	1	2	3	4
16. Helping to evaluate school staff.....	1	2	3	4
17. Participating in the decisions to hire or fire school staff.....	1	2	3	4
18. Helping to evaluate students' progress.....	1	2	3	4
19. Going to parent/teacher conferences about your child's work.....	1	2	3	4
20. Giving school board or school administration ideas for rule changes in the school or school district.....	1	2	3	4
21. Going to parent/teacher meetings as part of P.T.A. meetings, curriculum evenings, or other special school program.....	1	2	3	4

Part V

What do you think teachers and administrators could do to increase the level of parent involvement in their schools? Listed below are some suggestions which have been offered.

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of these suggestions.

WHICH OF THESE SUGGESTIONS WOULD WORK
TO GET PARENTS INVOLVED IN SCHOOLS?
CIRCLE THE NUMBER OF YOUR ANSWER

<u>Suggestions</u>	<u>Strongly</u> <u>Disagree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Strongly</u> <u>Agree</u>
1. Send more information to parents about ways they could become involved.....	1	2	3	4
2. Make parents feel more welcome at school....	1	2	3	4
3. Help parents to better understand the subjects being taught at school.....	1	2	3	4
4. Have informal meetings where parents, and school staff can get to know each other.....	1	2	3	4
5. Ask parents how they would like to be involved in education.....	1	2	3	4
6. Giving parents "assignments" they can do at home with their children.....	1	2	3	4
7. Having more projects where parents and teachers are working with each other.....	1	2	3	4
8. Giving parents more information about their child's successes in school.....	1	2	3	4
9. Planning school activities for parents at times when working parents can attend.....	1	2	3	4
10. Having activities include the children along with the parents and teachers.....	1	2	3	4
11. Other _____				

Part VI

The following information is needed to describe the teachers answering this survey.
Please answer each question as well as you can.

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female

2. Age: ☐ 25-30
 ☐ 31-40
 ☐ 41-50
 ☐ 51-60
 ☐ over 60

3. Formal Education: What is your highest academic degree (completed)?
 ☐ B.A.
 ☐ B.Ed.
 ☐ M.Ed.
 ☐ M.A.
 ☐ Other

4. Additional Qualifications: Do you hold a specialist certificate?
 ☐ Yes
 ☐ No

5. Grade Level: What grade level(s) do you presently teach? Check two or more levels if applicable. If you teach in two or more areas, and one consumes more time than the other, note the one that consumes the most time with a star (*).
 ☐ Primary (K-3)
 ☐ Junior (4-6)

6. Specific Work Experience: How many years (completed) have you been in your present position.
 ☐ 1-5 years
 ☐ 6-10 years
 ☐ 11-20 years
 ☐ 21-30 years
 ☐ over 30 years

7. General Work Experience: In total, how many years (completed) have you worked in a school system, Ontario or otherwise.

_____ 1-5 years
_____ 6-10 years
_____ 11-20 years
_____ 21-30 years
_____ over 30 years

APPENDIX C: PARENT INTERVIEW OUTLINE

Interview Opening Statement

This interview is an extension of the parent survey that was sent out to all of the parents of students at the school in April. The purpose of the interview is to get more information from parents to help us learn more about home and school relations and for helping us implement sessions, policies, and programs regarding parent involvement. This interview is about your experiences with the school and your thoughts and feelings about your experiences. It is also about your opinions about certain issues regarding parent involvement. The responses from the 10 parents who will be interviewed will be combined to help us attain greater insight into the issue of parent involvement. Nothing you say will ever be identified with you personally. As we go through the interview, if you have any questions about why I am asking some particular things, please feel free to ask. Or if there's anything you don't want to respond to, just say so.

This interview will be recorded to help me keep an accurate account of what is being said. If at any time you would like me to stop recording, just say so. I will also be taking notes as a back up in case the recording does not work or is unclear.

Are there any questions before we begin?

First I will begin with a group of questions which will give me a bit of background about yourself and then I will move on to asking you about some of your experiences as a parent being involved with the school

1. Did you attend a public school?
2. How long have you had a child in the public school system?
3. How many schools has your child or have your children attended?
4. During this time, in what ways have you as a parent been involved with the school?
5. How do you usually feel when you come to the school? By this I mean, do you feel relaxed, anxious, excited, happy, frustrated or any other type of feeling.
6. What do you think it is that makes you feel this way?
7. Based on your experiences, what would you say has been the most positive experience you as a parent have had with the school?
8. What about a negative experience? (Who, what where, when, why, how...)
9. How do you think your involvement has affected your child or children?
10. How would you compare your your own parents were involved with the school when you went to school, with how you as a parent are involved with the school?
11. Looking into the future, 5 years from now, how do you foresee your involvement with the school?

Okay, you've given me some information about your experiences as a parent involved with school. Now I would like to ask you for your recommendations.

12. If you had the power to change how you are involved with the school, what would you make different?

The second part of the interview asks for your opinions on a number of current issues regarding parental involvement with the school. There are no right or wrong answers, just give us your opinions.

13. In your opinion whose responsibility is it to get the parents involved with the school? (the principals, teachers, parents themselves)
14. What do you think about having parents involved with hiring principals for the school?
15. What do you think about having parents evaluate teachers?
16. What is your opinion about having parents involved with decisions regarding the school budget? (where and how the money is spent in the school where your children attend)
17. What do you think about having parents involved with evaluating their child's progress? (this could include designing report cards, setting goals, conferencing with your child)
18. In your opinion, would you like to see parents become involved in deciding what is to be learned?
19. If parents are asked to help make some of the decisions mentioned above, do you foresee any problems?
20. Overall, how involved do you think parents should be in the running of the schools?
21. Are there any other ways you would like to see parents involved with the school that have not been mentioned?

The third part of this interview is about the current move to have parent councils set up in each school. By parent councils I mean that a number of parents would be elected to serve on a council with 1 or 2 teachers and the vice-principal and principal, as well as a member of the community and possibly a student. This council would then be responsible for advising and possibly making school decisions. What decisions would be made has not yet been determined but could include some of the decisions mentioned in the previous part of this interview.

22. What do you think about having the parents of the school elect 10 to 12 parents to serve on a council for the school?
(to date, these council members would not be paid) Do you think 10 to 12 is the number of parents to have on the council?
23. What effect do you think parent councils would have on the running of the school?
24. What qualities do you think the parent should have to serve on this council?
25. How many years do you think parents should serve on the council?
26. Do you think the council should be advisory or decision making? What would be your reasons for making it advisory or decision making?
27. Do you think there are other ways to get parents involved besides having school councils? (what are these ways?)

The final part of this interview deals with communicating information between the parents and the school, since it is an important part of the relationship between the school and the home. I would like to ask you for your opinion on a number of ways that information is communicated between the school and the home.

28. Monthly school newsletters: What information do they give you as a parent? If there was anything you could change about the monthly school newsletters, what would that be?

29. Report cards: If you could change anything about the report card your child or children receive, what would that be?

30. Interviews or conference sessions: How do you usually feel during a conference between a teacher and a parent? If you could change anything about the interview or conference process, what would that be?

31. What information do you not receive from the school that you would like to receive?

32. Would you be willing to come to the school more often to discuss your child's progress or spend some time seeing what they do?

33. On a final note, is there anything else you would like to discuss about parent involvement? This could include general concerns or positive thoughts you would like to share?

Interview Closing Statement

I would like to thank you for taking the time to do this interview. The information you have given me is greatly appreciated and will definitely help us learn more about the issue of parent involvement in the schools.

APPENDIX D: TEACHER INTERVIEW OUTLINE

Interview Opening Statement

This interview is an extension of the teacher survey that was sent out to all of the teachers at the school in April. The purpose of this interview is to get more information from teachers to help us learn more about home and school relations and for helping us implement sessions, policies, and programs regarding parent involvement. This interview is about your experiences with parents involved with the school and your thoughts and feelings about your experiences. It is also about your opinions about certain issues regarding parent involvement. The responses from the 6 teachers who will be interviewed will be combined to help us attain greater insight into the issue of parent involvement. Nothing you say will ever be identified with you personally. As we go through the interview, if you have any questions about why I'm asking some particular things, please feel free to ask. Or if there's anything you don't want to respond to, just say so.

This interview will be recorded to help me keep an accurate account of what is being said. If at any time you would like me to stop recording, just say so. I will also be taking notes as a back up just in case the recording does not work or is unclear.

Are there any questions before we begin?

First I will begin with a group of questions which will give me a bit of background about yourself and then I will move on to asking you about some of your experiences with parents who have been involved with the school

1. Have you always worked as a teacher for the present Board of Education?
2. How long have you worked as a teacher?
3. How many schools have you taught in?
4. During this time, in what ways formally or informally have you as a teacher had parents involved with the school?
5. How do you usually feel when you have parents in your classroom? By this I mean, do you feel relaxed, anxious, excited, happy, frustrated or any other type of feeling.
6. What do you think it is that makes you feel this way?
7. Based on your experiences, what would you say has been the most positive experience you as a teacher have had with a parent or group of parents involved with the school?
8. What about a negative experience? (Who, what where, when, why, how...)
9. How do you think having (or not having) parents involved with the classroom has affected you as a teacher?
10. Looking into the future, 5 years from now, how do you foresee parents will be involved with the school?

Okay, you've given me some information about your experiences with parents involved with school. Now I would like to ask you for your recommendations.

11. If you had the power to change how parents are involved with the school, what would you make different?

The second part of the interview asks for your opinions on a number of current issues regarding parental involvement with the school. There are no right or wrong answers, just give us your opinions.

12. In your opinion whose responsibility is it to get the parents involved with the school? (the principals, teachers, parents themselves)
13. What do you think about having parents involved with hiring principals for the school?
14. What do you think about having parents evaluate teachers?
15. What is your opinion about having parents involved with decisions regarding the school budget? (where and how the money is spent in the school where your children attend)
16. What do you think about having parents involved with evaluating their child's progress? (this could include designing report cards, setting goals, conferencing with your child)
17. In your opinion, would you like to see parents become involved in deciding what is to be learned?
18. If parents are asked to help make some of the decisions mentioned above, do you foresee any problems?
19. Overall, how involved do you think parents should be in the running of the schools?
20. Are there any other ways you would like to see parents involved with the school that have not been mentioned?

The third part of this interview is about the current move to have parent councils set up in each school. By parent councils I mean that a number of parents would be elected to serve on a council with 1 or 2 teachers and the vice-principal and principal, as well as a member of the community and possibly a student. This council would then be responsible for advising and possibly making school decisions. What decisions would be made has not yet been determined but could include some of the decisions mentioned in the previous part of this interview.

21. What do you think about having the parents of the school elect 10 to 12 parents to serve on a council for the school?
(to date, these council members would not be paid) Do you think 10 to 12 is the number of parents to have on the council?
22. What effect do you think parent councils would have on the running of the school?
23. What qualities do you think the parent should have to serve on this council?
24. How many years do you think parents should serve on the council?
25. Do you think the council should be advisory or decision making? What would be your reasons for making it advisory or decision making?
26. Do you think there are other ways to get parents involved besides having school councils? (what are these ways?)

The final part of this interview deals with communicating information between the parents and the school, since it is an important part of the relationship between the school and the home. I would like to ask you for your opinion on a number of ways that information is communicated between the school and the home.

27. Monthly school newsletters: What information do they give the parents that is important to you as a teacher? If there was anything you could change about the monthly school newsletters, what would that be?

28. Report cards: If you could change anything about the report card you send home with your students, what would that be?

29. Interviews or conference sessions: How do you usually feel during a conference between a teacher and a parent? If you could change anything about the interview or conference process, what would that be?

30. What information do you not send that you would like to send?

31. Would you be willing to have the parents in more often to discuss their child's progress?

32. On a final note, is there anything else you would like to discuss about parent involvement? This could include general concerns or positive thoughts you would like to share?

Interview Closing Statement

I would like to thank you for taking the time to do this interview. The information you have given me is greatly appreciated and will definitely help us learn more about the issue of parent involvement in the schools.